THE LILY SERIES

FIRESIDE AND CAMP STORIES

Georgina J. Graham

25 Balcarres St
Edinburgh

From her Mother
With love

from Betsy Aldall

THE LILY SERIES.

FIRESIDE AND CAMP STORIES.

Boston, 1869
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BY THE AUTHOR OF

"LITTLE WOMEN," "GOOD WIVES,"
"SOMETHING TO DO," ETC.

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FIRESIDE AND CAMP STORIES.

The Blue and the Grey.

"DON'T bring him in here; every corner is full," said the nurse, eyeing with dismay the gaunt figure lying on the stretcher in the doorway.

"Where *shall* we put him, then? They can't have him in either of the other wards on this floor. He's ordered up here, and here he must stay, if he's put in the hall, poor devil!" said the foremost bearer, looking around the crowded room in despair.

The nurse's eye followed his, and both saw a thin hand beckoning from the end of the long ward.

"It's Murry; I'll see what he wants;" and

Miss Mercy went to him with her quick, noiseless step, and the smile her grave face always wore for him.

"There's room here, if you turn my bed round, you see. Don't let them leave him in the hall," said Murry, lifting his great eyes to her, brilliant with the fever burning his strength away, and pathetic with the silent protest of life against death.

"It's like you to think of it; he's a rebel," began Miss Mercy.

"So much more reason to take him in. I don't mind having him here; but it will distress me dreadfully to know that any poor soul was turned away, from the comfort of this ward especially."

The look he gave her made the words an eloquent compliment, and his pity for a fallen enemy reproached her for her own lack of it. Her face softened as she nodded, and glanced about the recess.

"You will have the light in your eyes, and only the little table between you and a very disagreeable neighbour," she said.

"I can shut my eyes if the light troubles them; I've nothing else to do now," he answered, with a faint laugh. "I was too comfortable before, I'd

more than my share of luxuries; so bring him along, and it will be all right."

The order was given, and, after a brief bustle, the two narrow beds stood side by side in the recess under the organ-loft—for the hospital had been a church. Left alone for a moment, the two men eyed each other silently. Murry saw a tall, sallow man, with fierce black eyes, wild hair and beard, and a thin-lipped, cruel mouth. A ragged grey uniform was visible under the blanket thrown over him; and in strange contrast to the squalor of his dress and the neglect of his person was the diamond ring that shone on his unwounded hand. The right arm was bound up, the right leg amputated at the knee; and, though the man's face was white and haggard with suffering, not a sound escaped him as he lay with his eyes fixed half defiantly upon his neighbour.

John Clay, the new-comer, saw opposite him a small, wasted figure and a plain face; yet both face and figure were singularly attractive, for suffering seemed to have refined away all the grosser elements, and left the spiritual very visible through that frail tenement of flesh. Pale-brown hair streaked the hollow temples and white forehead. A deep colour in the thin cheeks still tanned by the wind and weather of a long campaign. The

mouth was grave and sweet, and in the grey eyes lay an infinite patience touched with melancholy. He wore a dressing-gown, but across his feet lay a faded coat of army-blue. As the other watched him, he saw a shadow pass across his tranquil face, and for a moment he laid his wasted hand over the eyes that had been so full of pity. Then he gently pushed a mug of fresh water and the last of a bunch of grapes toward the exhausted rebel, saying, in a cordial tone:

"You look faint and thirsty; have 'em."

Clay's lips were parched, and his hand went involuntarily toward the cup; but he caught it back, and, leaning forward, asked, in a shrill whisper:

"Where are you hurt?"

"A shot in the side," answered Murry, visibly surprised at the man's manner.

"What battle?"

"The Wilderness."

"Is it bad?"

"I'm dying of wound-fever; there's no hope, they say."

That reply, so simple, so serenely given, would have touched almost any hearer; but Clay smiled grimly, and lay down as if satisfied, with his one hand clenched, and an exulting glitter in his eyes, muttering to himself:

"The loss of my leg comes easier after hearing that."

Murry saw his lips move, but caught no sound, and asked, with friendly solicitude:

"Do you want anything, neighbour?"

"Yes—to be let alone," was the curt reply, with a savage frown.

"That's easily done. I shan't trouble you very long, anyway;" and, with a sigh, Murry turned his face away, and lay silent till the surgeon came up on his morning round.

"Oh, you're here, are you? It's like Mercy Carrol to take you in," said Dr. Fitz Hugh, as he surveyed the rebel, with a slight frown; for, in spite of his benevolence and skill, he was a staunch loyalist, and hated the South just then.

"Don't praise me; he never would have been here but for Murry," answered Miss Mercy, as she approached, with her dressing-tray in her hand.

"Bless the lad! he'll give up his bed next, and feel offended if he's thanked for it. How are you, my good fellow?" and the doctor turned to press the hot hand with a friendly face.

"Much easier and stronger, thank you, doctor," was the cheerful answer.

"Less fever, pulse better, breath freer—good symptoms. Keep on so for twenty-four hours,

and, by my soul, I believe you'll have a chance for your life, Murry," cried the doctor, as his experienced eye took note of a hopeful change.

"In spite of the opinion of three good surgeons to the contrary?" asked Murry, with a wistful smile.

"Hang everybody's opinion! We are but mortal men, and the best of us make mistakes, in spite of science and experience. There's Parker; we all gave him up, and the rascal is larking round Washington as well as ever to-day. While there's life there's hope; so cheer up, my lad, and do your best for the little girl at home."

"Do you really think I may hope?" cried Murry, white with the joy of this unexpected reprieve.

"Hope is a capital medicine, and I prescribe it for a day at least. Don't build on this change too much, but if you are as well to-morrow as this morning, I give you my word, I think you'll pull through."

Murry laid his hands over his face with a broken "Thank God for that!" and the doctor turned away with a sonorous "Hem!" and an air of intense satisfaction.

During this conversation Miss Mercy had been watching the rebel, who looked and listened to

the others so intently that he forgot her presence. She saw an expression of rage and disappointment gather in his face as the doctor spoke; and when Murry accepted the hope held out to him, Clay set his teeth with an evil look, that would have boded ill for his neighbour had he not been helpless.

"Ungrateful traitor! I'll watch him, for he'll do mischief if he can," she thought, and reluctantly began to unbind his arm for the doctor's inspection.

"Only a flesh-wound—no bones broken; a good syringing, rubber cushion, plenty of water, and it will soon heal. You'll attend to that, Miss Mercy. This stump is more in my line;" and Dr. Fitz Hugh turned to the leg, leaving the arm to the nurse's skilful care.

"Evidently amputated in a hurry, and neglected since. If you're not careful, young man, you'll change places with your neighbour here."

"I detest him!" said Clay, with an emphasis which caused the doctor to glance at his vengeful face.

"Don't be a brute, if you can help it. But for him you'd have fared ill," began the doctor.

"But for him I never should have been here," muttered the man, in French, with a furtive glance about the room.

"You owe this to him?" asked the doctor, touching the wound, and speaking in the same tongue.

"Yes, but he paid for it; at least, I thought he had."

"By the Lord! if you are the sneaking rascal that shot him as he lay wounded in the ambulance, I shall be tempted to leave you to your fate!" cried the doctor, with a wrathful flash in his keen eyes.

"Do it, then, for it was I," answered the man, defiantly; adding, as if anxious to explain, "We had a tussle, and each got hurt in the thick of the skirmish. He was put in the ambulance afterward, and I was left to live or die, as luck would have it. I was hurt the worst; they should have taken me too. It made me mad to see him chosen, and I fired my last shot as he drove away. I didn't know whether I hit him or not; but when they told me I must lose my leg I hoped I had, and now I am satisfied."

He spoke rapidly, with clenched hands and fiery eyes, and the two listeners watched him with a sort of fascination as he hissed out the last words, glancing at the occupant of the next bed. Murry evidently did not understand French; he lay with averted face, closed eyes, and a hopeful

smile still on his lips, quite unconscious of the meaning of the fierce words uttered close beside him. Dr. Fitz Hugh had laid down his instruments and knit his black brows irefully while he listened. But as the man paused, the doctor looked at Miss Mercy, who was quietly going on with her work, though there was an expression about her handsome mouth that made her womanly face look almost grim. Taking up his tools, the doctor followed her example, saying slowly:

"If I didn't believe Murry was mending, I'd turn you over to Roberts, whom the patients dread as they do the devil. I must do my duty, and you may thank Murry for it."

"Does he know you are the man who shot him?" asked Mercy, still in French.

"No, I shouldn't stay here long if he did," answered Clay, with a short laugh.

"Don't tell him, then—at least, till after you are moved," she said, in a tone of command.

"Where am I going?" demanded the man.

"Anywhere out of my ward," was the brief answer, with a look that made the black eyes waver and fall.

In silence nurse and doctor did their work, and passed on. In silence Murry lay hour after hour,

and silently did Clay watch and wait, till, utterly exhausted by the suffering he was too proud to confess, he sank into a stupor, oblivious alike of hatred, defeat, and pain. Finding him in this pitiable condition, Mercy relented, and, woman-like, forgot her contempt in pity. He was not moved, but tended carefully all that day and night; and when he woke from a heavy sleep, the morning sun shone again on two pale faces in the beds, and flashed on the buttons of two army coats hanging side by side on the recess wall, on loyalist and rebel, on the blue and the grey.

Dr. Fitz Hugh stood beside Murry's cot, saying cheerily, "You are doing well, my lad—better than I hoped. Keep calm and cool, and, if all goes right, we'll have little Mary here to pet you in a week."

"Who's Mary?" whispered the rebel to the attendant who was washing his face.

"His sweetheart; he left her for the war, and she's waitin' for him back, poor soul!" answered the man, with a somewhat vicious scrub across the sallow cheek he was wiping.

"So he'll get well, and go home and marry the girl he left behind him, will he?" sneered Clay, fingering a little case that hung about his neck, and was now visible as his rough valet unbuttoned his collar.

"What's that? your sweetheart's picter?" asked Jim, the attendant, eyeing the gold chain anxiously.

"I've got none," was the gruff answer.

"So much the wuss for you, then. Small chance of gettin' one here; our girls won't look at you, and you ain't likely to see any of your own sort for a long spell, I reckon," added Jim, working away at the rebel's long-neglected hair.

Clay lay looking at Mercy Carrol as she went to and fro among the men, leaving a smile behind her, and carrying comfort wherever she turned—a right womanly woman, lovely and loveable, strong yet tender, patient yet decided, skilful, kind, and tireless in the discharge of duties that would have daunted most women. It was in vain she wore the plain grey gown and long apron, for neither could hide the grace of her figure. It was in vain she brushed her luxuriant hair back into a net, for the wavy locks would fall on her forehead, and stray curls would creep out or glisten like gold under the meshes meant to conceal them. Busy days and watchful nights had not faded the beautiful bloom on her cheeks, or dimmed the brightness of her hazel eyes. Always ready, fresh, and fair, Mercy Carrol was regarded as the good angel of the hospital, and not a man in it,

sick or well, but was a loyal friend to her. None dared to be a lover, for her little romance was known; and, though still a maid, she was a widow in their eyes, for she had sent her lover to his death, and over the brave man's grave had said, "Well done."

Jim watched Clay as his eye followed the one female figure there, and, observing that he clutched the case still tighter, asked again:

"What is that? a charm?"

"Yes—against pain, captivity, and shame."

"Strikes me it ain't kep' you from any one of 'em," said Jim, with a laugh.

"I haven't tried it yet."

"How does it work?" Jim asked, more respectfully, being impressed by something in the rebel's manner.

"You will see when I use it. Now let me alone;" and Clay turned impatiently away.

"You've got p'ison, or some deviltry, in that thing. If you don't let me look, I'll swear I'll have it took away from you;" and Jim put his big hand on the slender chain with a resolute air.

Clay smiled a scornful smile, and offered the trinket, saying coolly:

"I only fooled you. Look as much as you like; you'll find nothing dangerous."

Jim opened the pocket, saw a lock of grey hair, and nothing more.

"Is that your mother's?"

"Yes; my dead mother's."

It was strange to see the instantaneous change that passed over the two men as each uttered that dearest word in all tongues. Rough Jim gently reclosed and returned the case, saying kindly:

"Keep it; I wouldn't rob you on't for no money."

Clay thrust it jealously into his breast, and the first trace of emotion he had shown softened his dark face as he answered, with a grateful tremor in his voice:

"Thank you. I wouldn't lose it for the world."

"May I say good morning, neighbour?" asked a feeble voice, as Murry turned a very wan but cheerful face toward him, when Jim moved on with his basin and towel.

"If you like," returned Clay, looking at him with those quick suspicious eyes of his.

"Well, I do like; so I say it, and hope you are better," returned the cordial voice.

"Are you?"

"Yes, thank God!"

"Is it sure?"

"Nothing is sure, in a case like mine, till I'm on my legs again; but I'm certainly better. I don't expect *you* to be glad, but I hope you don't regret it very much?"

"I don't." The smile that accompanied the words surprised Murry as much as the reply, for both seemed honest, and his kind heart warmed toward his suffering enemy.

"I hope you'll be exchanged as soon as you are able. Till then, you can go to one of the other hospitals, where there are many reb——I would say, Southerners. If you'd like, I'll speak to Dr. Fitz Hugh, and he'll see you moved," said Murry, in his friendly way.

"I'd rather stay here, thank you."

Clay smiled again as he spoke in the mild tone that surprised Murry as much as it pleased him.

"You like to be in my corner, then?" he said, with a boyish laugh.

"Very much—for a while."

"I'm very glad. Do you suffer much?"

"I shall suffer more by and by, if I go on; I'll risk it," answered Clay, fixing his feverish eyes on Murry's placid face.

"You expect to have a hard time with your leg?" said Murry, compassionately.

"With my soul."

It was an odd answer, and given with such an odd expression, as Clay turned his face away, that Murry said no more, fancying his brain a little touched by the fever evidently coming on.

They spoke but seldom to each other that day, for Clay lay apparently asleep, with a flushed cheek and restless head, and Murry tranquilly dreamed waking dreams of home and little Mary. That night, after all was still, Miss Mercy went up into the organ-loft to get fresh rollers for the morrow—the boxes of old linen, and such matters, being kept there. As she stood looking down on the thirty pale sleepers, she remembered that she had not played a hymn on the little organ for Murry, as she had promised, that day. Stealing softly to the front, she peeped over the gallery to see if he was asleep; if not, she would keep her word, for he was her favourite.

A screen had been drawn before the recess where the two beds stood, shutting their occupants from the sight of the other men. Murry lay sleeping, but Clay was awake, and a quick thrill tingled along the young woman's nerves as she saw his face. Leaning on one arm, he peered about the place with an eager, watchful air, and glanced up at the dark gallery, but did not see the startled face behind the central pillar. Pausing an

instant, he shook his one clenched hand at the unconscious sleeper, and then drew out the locket cautiously. Two white mugs, just alike, stood on the little table between the beds, water in each. With another furtive glance about him, Clay suddenly stretched out his long arm, and dropped something from the locket into Murry's cup. An instant he remained motionless, with a sinister smile on his face; then, as Jim's step sounded beyond the screen, he threw his arm over his face, and lay, breathing heavily, as if asleep.

Mercy's first impulse was to cry out; her next, to fly down and seize the cup. No time was to be lost, for Murry might wake and drink at any moment. What was in the cup? Poison, doubtless; that was the charm Clay carried to free himself from "pain, captivity, and shame," when all other hopes of escape vanished. This hidden helper he gave up to destroy his enemy, who was to outlive his shot, it seemed. Like a shadow, Mercy glided down, forming her plan as she went. A dozen mugs stood about the room, all alike in size and colour; catching up one, she partly filled it, and concealing it under the clean sheet hanging on her arm, went toward the recess, saying audibly:

"I want some fresh water, Jim."

Thus warned of her approach, Clay lay with carefully averted face as she came in, and never stirred as she bent over him, while she dexterously changed Murry's mug for the one she carried. Hiding the poisoned cup, she went away, saying aloud:

"Never mind the water now, Jim. Murry is asleep, and so is Clay; they'll not need it yet."

Straight to Dr. Fitz Hugh's room she went, and gave the cup into his keeping, with the story of what she had seen. A man was dying, and there was no time to test the water then; but putting it carefully away, he promised to set her fears at rest in the morning. To quiet her impatience, Mercy went back to watch over Murry till day dawned. As she sat down, she caught the glimmer of a satisfied smile on Clay's lips, and looking into the cup she had left, she saw that it was empty.

"He is satisfied, for he thinks his horrible revenge is secure. Sleep in peace, my poor boy! you are safe while I am here."

As she thought of this, she put her hand on the broad, pale forehead of the sleeper with a motherly caress, but started to feel how damp and cold it was. Looking nearer, she saw that a change had passed over Murry, for dark shadows

showed about his sunken eyes, his once quiet breath was faint and fitful now, his hand deathly cold, and a chilly dampness had gathered on his face. She looked at her watch; it was past twelve, and her heart sunk within her, for she had so often seen that solemn change come over men's faces then, that the hour was doubly weird and woful to her. Sending a message to Dr. Fitz Hugh, she waited anxiously, trying to believe that she deceived herself.

The doctor came at once, and a single look convinced him that he had left one death-bed for another.

"As I feared," he said; "that sudden rally was but a last effort of nature. There was just one chance for him, and he has missed it. Poor lad! I can do nothing; he'll sink rapidly, and go without pain."

"Can I do nothing?" asked Mercy, with dim eyes, as she held the cold hand close in both her own with tender pressure.

"Give him stimulants as long as he can swallow, and, if he's conscious, take any messages he may have. Poor Hall is dying hard, and I can help him; I'll come again in an hour, and say good-bye."

The kind doctor choked, touched the pale

sleeper with a gentle caress, and went away to help Hall die.

Murry slept on for an hour, then woke, and knew without words that his brief hope was gone. He looked up wistfully, and whispered, as Mercy tried to smile with trembling lips that refused to tell the heavy truth:

"I know—I feel it; don't grieve yourself by trying to tell me, dear friend. It's best so; I can bear it; but I did want to live."

"Have you any word for Mary, dear?" asked Mercy, for he seemed but a boy to her since she had nursed him.

One look of sharp anguish and dark despair passed over his face as he wrung his thin hands and shut his eyes, finding death terrible. It passed in a moment, and his pallid countenance grew beautiful with the pathetic patience of one who submits without complaint to the inevitable.

"Tell her I was ready, and the only bitterness was leaving her. I shall remember, and wait until she comes. My little Mary! Oh, be kind to her, for my sake, when you tell her this."

"I will, Murry, as God hears me. I will be a sister to her while I live."

As Mercy spoke, with fervent voice, he laid

the hand that had ministered to him so faithfully against his cheek, and lay silent, as if content.

"What else? let me do something more. Is there no other friend to be comforted?"

"No: she is all I have in the world. I hoped to make her so happy, to be so much to her, for she's a lonely little thing; but God says 'No,' and I submit."

A long pause, as he lay breathing heavily, with eyes that were dimming fast fixed on the gentle face beside him.

"Give Jim my clothes, send Mary a bit of my hair, and—may I give you this? it's a poor thing, but all I have to leave you, best and kindest of women."

He tried to draw off a slender ring, but the strength had gone out of his wasted fingers, and she helped him, thanking him with the first tears he has seen her shed. He seemed satisfied, but suddenly turned his eyes on Clay, who lay as if asleep. A sigh broke from Murry, and Mercy caught the words:

"How could he do it, and I so helpless!"

"Do you know him?" she whispered, eagerly, as she remembered Clay's own words.

"I knew he was the man who shot me, when he came. I forgive him; but I wish he had

spared me, for Mary's sake," he answered sorrowfully, not angrily.

"Do you really pardon him?" cried Mercy, wondering, yet touched by the words.

"I do. He will be sorry one day, perhaps; at any rate, he did what he thought his duty; and war makes brutes of us all sometimes, I fear. I'd like to say good-bye; but he's asleep after a weary day, so don't wake him. Tell him I'm glad *he* is to live, and that I forgive him heartily."

Although uttered between long pauses, these words seemed to have exhausted Murry, and he spoke no more till Dr. Fitz Hugh came. To him he feebly returned thanks, and whispered his farewell, then sank into a stupor, during which life ebbed fast. Both nurse and doctor forgot Clay as they hung over Murry, and neither saw the strange intentness of his face, the half awe-struck, half remorseful look he bent upon the dying man.

As the sun rose, sending its ruddy beams across the silent ward, Murry looked up and smiled, for the bright ray fell athwart the two coats hanging on the wall beside him. Some passer-by had brushed one sleeve of the blue coat across the grey, as if the inanimate things were shaking hands.

"It should be so—love our enemies; we should

be brothers," he murmured faintly; and, with the last impulse of a noble nature, stretched his hand toward the man who had murdered him.

But Clay shrunk back, and covered his face without a word. When he ventured to look up, Murry was no longer there. A pale, peaceful figure lay on the narrow bed, and Mercy was smoothing the brown locks as she cut a curl for Mary and herself. Clay could not take his eyes away; as if fascinated by its serenity, he watched the dead face with gloomy eyes, till Mercy, having done her part, stooped and kissed the cold lips tenderly as she left him to his sleep. Then, as if afraid to be alone with the dead, he bid Jim put the screen between the beds, and bring him a book. His order was obeyed; but he never turned its pages, and lay, with muffled head, trying to shut out little Watts' sobs, as the wounded drummer-boy mourned for Murry.

Death in a hospital makes no stir, and in an hour no trace of the departed remained but the coat upon the wall, for Jim would not take it down, though it was his now. The empty bed stood freshly made, the clean cup and worn Bible lay ready for other hands, and the card at the bed's head hung blank for a new-comer's name. In the hurry of this event, Clay's attempted crime was

forgotten for a time. But that evening Dr. Fitz Hugh told Mercy that her suspicions were correct, for the water *was* poisoned.

"How horrible! what shall we do?" she cried, with a gesture full of energetic indignation.

"Leave him to remorse!" replied the doctor, sternly, "I've thought over the matter, and believe this to be the only thing we can do. I fancy the man won't live a week; his leg is in a bad way, and he is such a fiery devil he gives himself no chance. Let him believe he killed poor Murry, at least for a few days. He thinks so now, and tries to rejoice; but if he has a human heart he will repent."

"But he may not. Should we not tell of this? Can he not be punished?"

"Law won't hang a dying man, and I'll not denounce him. Let remorse punish him while he lives, and God judge him when he dies. Murry pardoned him,—can we do less?"

Mercy's indignant face softened at the name, and for Murry's sake she yielded. Neither spoke of what they tried to think the act of a half-delirious man; and soon they could not refuse to pity him, for the doctor's prophecy proved true.

Clay was a haunted man, and remorse gnawed like a worm at his heart. Day and night he saw

that tranquil face on the pillow opposite; day and night he saw the pale hand outstretched to him; day and night he heard the faint voice murmuring kindly, regretfully, "I forgive him; but I wish he had spared me, for Mary's sake."

As the days passed, and his strength visibly declined, he began to suspect that he must soon follow Murry. No one told him; for, though both doctor and nurse did their duty faithfully, neither lingered long at his bedside, and not one of the men showed any interest in him. No new patient occupied the other bed, and he lay alone in the recess with his own gloomy thoughts.

"It will be all up with me in a few days, won't it?" he asked, abruptly, as Jim made his toilet one morning with unusual care, and such visible pity in his rough face that Clay could not but observe it.

"I heard the doctor say you wouldn't suffer much more. Is there any one you'd like to see, or leave a message for?" answered Jim, smoothing the long locks as gently as a woman.

"There isn't a soul in the world that cares whether I live or die, except the man who wants my money," said Clay, bitterly, as his dark face grew a shade paler at this confirmation of his fear.

"Can't you head him off some way, and leave your money to some one that's been kind to you? Here's the doctor—or, better still, Miss Carrol. Neither on 'em is rich, and both on 'em has been good friends to you, or you'd 'a' fared a deal wus than you have," said Jim, not without the hope that, in saying a good word for them, he might say one for himself also.

Clay lay thinking for a moment as his face clouded over, and then brightened again:

"Miss Mercy wouldn't take it, nor the doctor either; but I know who will—and, I declare, I'll do it!" he exclaimed, with sudden energy.

His eye happened to rest on Jim as he spoke, and feeling sure that he was to be the heir, Jim retired to send Miss Mercy, that the matter might be settled before Clay's mood changed. Miss Carrol came, and began to cut the buttons off Murry's coat while she waited for Clay to speak.

"What's that for?" he asked, restlessly.

"The men want them, and Jim is willing, for the coat is very old and ragged, you see. Murry gave his good one away to a sicker comrade, and took this instead. It was like him,—my poor boy!"

"I'd like to speak to you, if you have a minute to spare," began Clay, after a pause, during which

he watched her with a wistful, almost tender expression, unseen by her.

"I have time; what can I do for you?" Very gentle was Mercy's voice, very pitiful her glance, as she sat down by him, for the change in his manner, and the thought of his approaching death, touched her heart.

Trying to resume his former gruffness, and cold expression, Clay said, as he picked nervously at the blanket:

"I've a little property that I put into the care of a friend going North. He's kept it safe; and now, as I'll never want it myself, I'd like to leave it to—". He paused an instant, glanced quickly at Mercy's face, and seeing only womanly compassion there, added, with an irrepressible tremble in his voice,—"To little Mary."

If he had expected any reward for the act, any comfort for his lonely death-bed, he received both in fullest measure when he saw Mercy's beautiful face flush with surprise and pleasure, her eyes fill with sudden tears, and heard her cordial voice, as she pressed his hand warmly in her own.

"I wish I could tell you how glad I am for this! I thought you were better than you seemed; I was sure you had both heart and conscience, and that you would repent before you died."

"Repent of what?" he asked, with a startled look.

"Need I tell you?" and her eye went from the empty bed to his face.

"You mean that shot? But it was only fair, after all; we killed each other, and war is nothing but wholesale murder, any way." He spoke easily, but his eyes were full of trouble, and other words seemed to tremble on his lips.

Leaning nearer, Mercy whispered in his ear,—

"I mean the other murder, which you would have committed when you poisoned the cup of water he offered you, his enemy."

Every vestige of colour faded out of Clay's thin face, and his haggard eyes seemed fascinated by some spectre opposite, as he muttered slowly,—

"How do you know?"

"I saw you;" and she told him all the truth.

A look of intense relief passed over Clay's countenance, and the remorseful shadow lifted as he murmured, brokenly:

"Thank God I didn't kill him! Now, dying isn't so hard; now I can have a little peace."

Neither spoke for several minutes; Mercy had no words for such a time, and Clay forgot her presence as the tears dropped from between the wasted fingers spread before his face.

Presently he looked up, saying eagerly, as if his fluttering breath and rapidly failing strength warned him of approaching death:

"Will you write down a few words for me, so Mary can have the money? She needn't know anything about me, only that I was one to whom Murry was kind, and so I gave her all I had."

"I'll get my pen and paper; rest, now, my poor fellow," said Mercy, wiping the unheeded tears away for him.

"How good it seems to hear you speak so to *me!* How can you do it?" he whispered, with such grateful wonder in his dim eyes that Mercy's heart smote her for the past.

"I do it for Murry's sake, and because I sincerely pity you."

Timidly turning his lips to that kind hand, he kissed it, and then hid his face in his pillow. When Mercy returned, she observed that there were but seven tarnished buttons where she had left eight. She guessed who had taken it, but said nothing, and endeavoured to render poor Clay's last hours as happy as sympathy and care could make them. The letter and will were prepared as well as they could be, and none too soon; for, as if that secret was the burden that bound Clay's spirit to the shattered body, no sooner was it

lifted off than the diviner part seemed ready to be gone.

"You'll stay with me; you'll help me die; and—oh, if I dared to ask it, I'd beg you to kiss me once when I am dead, as you did Murry. I think I could rest then, and be fitter to meet him, if the Lord lets me," he cried imploringly, as the last night gathered around him, and the coming change seemed awful to a soul that possessed no inward peace, and no firm hope to lean on through the valley of the shadow.

"I will—I will! Hold fast to me, and believe in the eternal mercy of God," whispered Miss Carrol, with her firm hand in his, her tender face bending over him as the long struggle began.

"Mercy," he murmured, catching that word, and smiling feebly as he repeated it lingeringly. "Mercy! yes, I believe in her; she'll save me, if any one can. Lord, bless and keep her for ever and for ever."

There was no morning sunshine to gladden his dim eyes as they looked their last, but the pale glimmer of the lamp shone full on the blue and the grey coats hanging side by side. As if the sight recalled that other death-bed, that last act of brotherly love and pardon, Clay rose up in his bed, and while one hand clutched the button

hidden in his breast, the other was outstretched toward the empty bed, as his last breath parted in a cry of remorseful longing:

"I will! I will! Forgive me, Murry, and let me say good-bye!"

An Hour.

THE clock struck eleven.

"Look again, Gabriel; is there no light coming?"

"Not a ray, mother, and the night seems to darken every instant."

"Surely, half an hour is time enough to reach the main land and find Dr. Firth."

"Ample time; but Alec probably found the doctor absent, and is waiting for him?"

"But I bade the boy leave my message, and return at once. Every moment is precious; what can we do?"

"Nothing but wait."

An impatient sigh was the only answer vouchsafed to the unpalatable advice, and silence fell again upon the anxious watchers in the room. Still leaning in the deep recess of the window, the

young man looked out into the murky night, listened to the flow of the great river rolling to the sea, and let the unquiet current of his thoughts drift him whithersoever it would. His imaginative temperament found a sad similitude between the night and his own mood, for neither his physical nor mental eye could see what lay before him, and in his life there seemed to have come an hour as full of suspense, as prophetic of storm, as that which now oppressed the earth and lowered in the sky.

Every instant that brought the peace of death nearer to the father, also brought the cares of life nearer to the son, and their grim aspect daunted him. The child of a Northern mother, bred at the North by her dying desire, he had been summoned home to take the old man's place, and receive a slave-cursed inheritance into his keeping. Had he stood alone, his task would have been an easy one; for an upright nature, an enthusiastic spirit, would have found more sweetness than bitterness in a sacrifice made for conscience sake, more pride than pain in a just deed generously performed. But a step-mother and her daughters were dependent on him now, for the old man's sudden seizure left him no time to make provision for them; and the son found a double burden laid upon his shoul-

ders when he returned to what for years had been a loveless home to him. To reduce three delicately nurtured women to indigence seemed a cruel and Quixotic act to others, a very hard, though righteous one to him; for poverty looked less terrible than affluence founded upon human blood and tears. He had resolved to set aside all private ambitions and aspirations that he might dedicate his life to his kindred; had manfully withstood their ridicule and reproaches, and only faltered when, in their hour of bereavement, they appealed to him with tears and prayers. Then pity threatened to conquer principle, for Gabriel's heart was as gentle as it was generous. Three days of sorrowful suspense and inward strife had passed; now death seemed about to set its seal upon one life, and irresolution to mar another, for Gabriel still wavered between duty and desire, crying within himself, "Lord, help me! I see the right, but I am not strong enough to do it; let it be decided for me."

It was—suddenly, entirely, and for ever!

The tinkle of a bell roused him from his moody reverie, and, without quitting the shadow of the half-drawn curtain, he watched the scene before him with the interest of one in whom both soul and sense were alert to interpret and accept the

divine decree which he had asked, in whatever guise it came.

The bell summoned a person whose entrance seemed to bring warmth, vitality, and light into that gloomy room, although she was only a servant, with the blood of a despised race in her veins. More beautiful than either of her young mistresses, she looked like some brilliant flower of the tropics beside two pale exotics, and the unavoidable consciousness of this showed itself in the skill with which she made her simple dress a foil to her beauty, in the carriage of her graceful head and the sad pride of her eyes, as if, being denied all the other rights of womanhood, the slave clung to and cherished the one possession which those happier women lacked. As she entered, noiselessly, she gave one keen, comprehensive glance about the room,—a glance that took in the grey head and pallid face upon the pillow, the languid lady sitting at the bedside, the young sisters spent with weeping and watching, half asleep in either corner of a couch, and the man's glove that lay beside a brace of pistols on a distant table. Then her eyes fell, all expression faded from her face, and she stood before her mistress with a meek air, curiously at variance with the animated aspect she had worn on entering.

"Milly, are you sure you gave Alec my message correctly?" asked Mrs. Butler, imperiously, with a look of unconcealed dislike.

"Yes, missis, I gave it word for word."

The voice that answered would have gone straight to a stranger's heart and made it ache, for a world of hopeless patience rendered its music pathetic, and dignified the little speech, as if the woman's spirit uttered a protest in every word that passed her lips.

"He has been gone nearly an hour. I can wait no longer. Tell Andy to go at once and see what keeps him."

"Andy's down at the landing seeing to the boats before the storm, missis."

"Let Tony do that, and send Andy off at once."

"Tony's too cut up with his last whipping to stir."

"How very tiresome! Where is overseer Neal?"

"Sick, missis."

"Sick! I saw him two hours ago, and he was perfectly well then."

"He was taken very suddenly, but he'll be out of pain by morning."

As Milly spoke, with a slight motion of the

lips that would have been a scornful smile had she not checked it, a faint, far-off cry came on the wind; a cry of mortal fear or pain it seemed, and so full of ominous suggestion that, though inured to sounds of suffering, Mrs. Butler involuntarily exclaimed:

"What is that?"

"It's only Rachel screaming for her baby; the last thing old master did was to sell it, and she's been crazy ever since," answered Milly, with a peculiar quickening of the breath, and a sidelong glance.

"Foolish creature! but never mind her now: tell me who is about that I can send for Dr. Firth."

"There's no one in the house but blind Sandra and me."

"What do you mean? Who gave the people leave to go."

"I did."

Hitherto the girl had spoken in the subdued tone of a well-trained servant, though there was no trace of her race in her speech but a word or two here and there; for Milly's beauty had secured for her all the advantages which would increase her value as a chattel. But in the utterance of the last two words her voice rose with a sudden ring that arrested Mrs. Butler's attention, and caused

her to glance sharply at the girl. Milly stood before her meek and motionless, and not an eyelash stirred during that brief scrutiny. Her mistress could not see the mingled triumph and abhorrence burning in those averted eyes, did not observe the close clenching of the hand that hung at her side, nor guess what a sea of black and bitter memories was surging in her comely handmaid's heart.

"How dared you send the servants away without my orders?" demanded Mrs. Butler, in an irritated and irritating voice.

"Master Gabriel said the house must be kept very quiet on old master's account; I couldn't make the boys mind, so I sent them to the quarters."

"This is not the first time you have presumed upon my son's favour, and exceeded my orders. You have been spoiled by indulgence, but that shall be altered soon."

"Yes, missis,—it shall;" and as the girl added the latter words below her breath, there was a glitter as of white teeth firmly set lest some impetuous speech should break loose in spite of her. Her mistress did not mark that little demonstration, for her mind was occupied with its one care, as she said, half aloud, half to herself:

"What shall I do?" The night is passing,

your master needs help, and Alec has evidently forgotten, or never received, my message."

For the first time an expression of anxiety was visible on Milly's face, and there was more eagerness than deference in her suggestion:

"Master Gabriel might go; it would save time and make the matter sure, as missis doubts my word."

"It is impossible; his father might rouse and ask for him, and I will not be left alone. It is not his place to carry messages, nor yours to propose it. Quick! lift your master's head, and chafe his hands. God help us all!"

A low sigh from the bed caused the sudden change from displeasure to distress, as Mrs. Butler bent over her husband, forgetful of all else. What a strange smile flashed across Milly's face, and kindled the dark fire of her eyes, as she looked down upon the master and mistress, whose helplessness and grief touched no chord of pity or sympathy in her heart! Only an instant did she stand so, but in that instant the expression of her face was fully revealed, not to the drowsy sisters, but to Gabriel in his covert. He saw it, but before he could fathom its significance it was hidden from him; and when his mother looked up there was nothing to be seen but the handsome head

bending over the pale hand that Milly was assiduously chafing. Something in the touch of those warm palms seemed to rouse in the old man a momentary flicker of memory and strength, for the last thought that had disturbed his failing consciousness found utterance in broken words:

"I promised her her liberty,—she shall have it; wait a little, Milly,—wait till I am better."

"Yes, master, I can wait now;" and the girl's eye turned towards the clock with an impatient glance.

The old man did not hear her, for, with an incoherent murmur, he seemed to sink into a deeper lethargy than before. His wife believed him dying; and cried, as she wrung her hands in a paroxysm of despairing helplessness:

"Look out, Milly, look out! and if no one is coming, run to the quarters and send off the first boy you meet."

Milly moved deliberately towards the window, but paused half-way to ask, with the same shade of anxiety flitting over her face:

"Where is Master Gabriel? shouldn't he be called?"

"He was here a moment ago, and has gone to the landing, doubtless; you can call him as you go."

With sudden eagerness the girl glided to the window, now too intent upon some purpose of her own to see the dark outline of a figure half concealed in the deep folds of the curtain; and, leaning far out, she peered into the gloom with an intentness that sharpened every feature.

"There is no one coming, missis," she said, raising her voice unnecessarily, as one listener thought, unless the momentary stillness made any sound seem unusually loud. As the words left her lips, from below there came a soft chirp as of some restless bird; it was twice repeated, then came a pause, and in it, with a rapid, noiseless gesture, Milly drew a handkerchief from her pocket and dropped it from the window. It fluttered whitely for a moment, and as it disappeared an acute ear might have caught the sound of footsteps stealing stealthily away. Milly evidently heard them, for an expression of relief began to dawn upon her face. Suddenly it changed to one of terror, as, in the act of withdrawing her arm, a strong hand grasped it, and Gabriel's voice demanded:

"What does this mean, Milly?"

For a moment she struggled like some wild creature caught in a net, then steadied herself by a desperate effort, exclaiming, breathlessly,—

"Oh, Master Gabriel, how you frightened me!"

"I meant to. Now tell what all this means, at once and truly," he said, in a tone intended to be stern, but which was only serious and troubled.

"All what means, sir?" she answered, feigning innocent surprise, though her eye never met his, and she still trembled in his hold.

"You know; the signals, the dropping of the handkerchief, the steps below there, and the figure creeping through the grass."

"Master must have quick eyes and ears to see and hear all that in such a minute. I only saw my handkerchief drop by accident; I only heard a bird chirp, and one of the dogs creep round the house;" but as she spoke she cast an uneasy glance over her shoulder into the night without.

"Why lie to me, Milly?" I have watched you ever since you came in, and you are not yourself to-night. Something is wrong; I've felt it all day, but thought it was anxiety for my poor father. Why are all the people sent off to the quarters? Why is Andy meddling with the boats without my orders? and why do you look, speak, and act in this inexplicable manner?"

"If master gets worried and imagines mischief when there is none, I can't help it," she said doggedly.

Both while speaking and listening Gabriel had

scrutinized her closely, and all he saw confirmed his suspicion that something serious was amiss. In the slender wrist he held the pulse thrilled quick and strong; he heard the rapid beating of her heart, the flutter of the breath upon her lips; saw that her face was colourless, her eyes both restless and elusive. He was sure that no transient fear agitated her, but felt some unwonted excitement possessed her, threatening to break out in spite of the self-control which years of servitude had taught her. What he had just seen and heard alarmed him; for his father had been a hard master, the island was governed by fear alone, and he never trod the dykes that bounded the long, low rice-fields without feeling as if he walked upon a crater-crust which might crack and spew fire any day. Many small omens of evil had occurred of late, which now returned to his recollection with sinister significance; and the vague disquiet that had haunted him all day now seemed an instinctive premonition of impending danger. Many fears flashed through his mind, and one resolution was firmly fixed. His face grew stern, his voice commanding, and his hand tightened its hold as he said:

"Speak, Milly, or I shall be tempted to use my authority as a master, and that I never wish to do

If there is any deviltry afloat I must know it; and if you will not tell it me I shall search the island till I find it for myself."

She looked at him for the first time, as he spoke, with a curious blending of defiance for the master and admiration for the man. His last words changed it to one of fear; and her free hand was extended as if to bar his way, while she said, below her breath, and with another glance into the outer gloom:

"You are safe here, but if you leave the house it will cost you your life."

"Then it must; for if you will not show me the peril, I swear I'll go to meet it blindly."

"No, no, wait a little; I dare not tell!"

"You shall tell. I am the mistress here, and have borne enough. Speak, girl, at once, or this proud spirit of yours shall be broken till you do."

Mrs. Butler had heard all that passed, had approached them, and being a woman who was by turns imperious, peevish, and passionate, she yielded to the latter impulse as she spoke, and gave the girl's shoulder an impatient shake, as if to force the truth out of her. The touch, the tone, were like sparks to powder; for the smouldering fire blazed up as Milly flung her off, wrenched herself free from Gabriel, and turned

on his mother with a look that sent her back to her husband trembling and dismayed.

"Yes, I will speak, though it is too soon!" cried Milly with a short sharp laugh. "They may kill me for telling before the time; I can't help it; I must have one hour of freedom, if I die the next. There *is* deviltry afloat to-night, and it is yourselves you may blame for it. We can't bear any more, and before a new master comes to torment us like the old one, we've determined to try for liberty, though there'll be bloody work before we get it. The boys are not at the quarters, but fifty are waiting at the rice-mill till midnight, and then they'll come up here to do as they've been done by. While they wait they're beginning with overseer Neal; whipping, burning, torturing him, for all I know, as other men, and women too, have been whipped, burnt, and tortured there. That was his scream you heard. Alec never went for the doctor; Andy's guarding the boats till we want them; big Mose is watching round the house; the alarm bell's down; I've cleared the house of arms, and spoilt the pistols that I dared not take; Master Gabriel's the only white man on the island, and there's no help for you unless the Lord turns against us. Who is the mistress now?"

The girl paused there, breathless but exultant, for the words had poured from her lips as if the pent-up degradation, wrath, and wrong of nineteen years had broken bounds at last and must overflow, even though they wrecked her by their vehemence. Some spirit stronger than herself seemed to possess and speak out of her, making her look like an embodied passion, beautiful, yet terrible, as she glanced from face to face, seeing how pale and panic-stricken each became, as her rapid words made visible the retribution that hung over them. Gabriel stood aghast at the swift and awful answer given to his prayer; the daughters fled to their mother's arms for shelter; the wife clung to her husband for the protection which he could no longer give, and, as if dragged back to life by weight of a woe, such as he had himself inflicted on others, the old man rose up in his bed, speechless, helpless, yet conscious of the dangers of the hour, and doubly daunted by death's terrors, because so powerless to succour those for whom he had perilled his own soul. A bitter cry broke from him as his last look showed him the impending doom which all his impotent remorse could not avert, and in that cry the old man's spirit passed, to find that, even for such as he, Infinite justice was tempered with Infinite mercy.

During the few moments in which the wife and daughters forgot fear in sorrow, and the son took hurried counsel with himself how best to meet the danger, Milly was learning that the bitter far exceeds the sweet in human vengeance. The slave exulted in the freedom so dearly purchased, but the woman felt that in avenging them her wrongs had lost her dignity, and though she had changed places with her mistress, she found that power did not bring her peace. She had no skill to analyze the feeling, no words in which to express it, even to herself, but she was so strongly conscious of it, that its mysterious power marred the joy she thought to feel, and forced her to confess that in the hour of expected triumph she was baffled and defeated by her own conscience. With women doomed to a fate like hers, the higher the order of intelligence, the deeper the sense of degradation, the more intense the yearning for liberty at any price. Milly had always rebelled against her lot, although compared with that of her class, it had not been a hard one till the elder Butler bought her, that his son, seeing slavery in such a lovely form, might learn to love it. But Gabriel, in his brief visits, soon convinced his father that no temptation could undermine his sturdy Northern sense of right and justice, and though he might

easily learn to love the beautiful woman, he could not learn to oppress the slave whose utter helplessness appealed to all that was manliest in him.

Milly felt this deeply, and knew that the few black drops in her veins parted herself and Gabriel more hopelessly than the widest seas that ever rolled between two lovers. This inexorable fact made all the world look dark to her; life became a burden, and one purpose alone sustained her,—the resolution to achieve her own liberty, to enjoy a brief triumph over those who had wronged her, and then to die, and find compensation for a hapless human love in the fatherly tenderness of a Divine one. She had prayed, worked, and waited for this hour, with all the ardour, energy, and patience of her nature. Yet when it came she was not satisfied, a sense of guilt oppressed her, and the loss seemed greater than the gain. Gabriel had given her a look which wounded more deeply than the sharpest reproach; and the knowledge that she had forfeited the confidence he had always shown her, now made her gloomy when she would have been glad, humble when she thought to have been proudest. Gabriel saw and understood her mood, felt that their only hope of deliverance lay in her, and while his mother and sisters lamented for the dead, he bestirred himself to save the living.

"Milly," he began, with sad seriousness, "we deserve no mercy, and I ask none for myself; I only implore you to spare the women and give me time to atone for the weak, the wicked hesitation which has brought us to this pass. I meant to free you all as soon as you were legally mine, as it was too late for my father to endear his memory by one just act. But it was hard to make my mother and my sisters poor, and so I waited, hoping to be shown some way by which I could be just and generous both to you and them."

"Three women were more precious than two hundred helpless creatures, in the eyes of a Christian gentleman from the free North! I'm glad you told me this;" and there was something like contempt in the look she gave her master.

There was no answer to that, for it was true; and in the remorseful shame that sent the blood to Gabriel's forehead, he confessed the fact which he was too honest to deny. Still looking at her, with eyes that pleaded for him better than his words, he said, with a humility that conquered her disdain:

"I shall expiate that sin if I die to-night; and I will give myself up to be dealt with as you please, if you will save my mother and my sisters, and let them free you in my name. Before God

and my dead father, I promise this, upon my honour!"

"There are no witnesses to that but those whom I'll not trust; honour means nothing to us who are not allowed to keep our own," said Milly, looking moodily upon the ground, as if she feared to look up lest she should relent, for excitement was ebbing fast, and a flood of regretful recollections rising in her heart.

"I did not expect that reproach from you," Gabriel answered, taking courage from the signs he saw. "Do you remember, when my father gave you to me, how indignantly I rejected the gift, and promised that in my eyes you should be as sacred as either of those poor girls? Have I not kept my word, Milly?"

"Yes! oh, yes!" she said, with trembling lips, and eyes she dared not lift, they were so full of grateful tears. Carefully steadying her traitorous voice, she added, earnestly, "Master Gabriel, I *do* remember, and I've tried all day to save you, but you wouldn't go. I will trust your word, and do my best to help the ladies, if they'll promise to free us all to-morrow, and you will leave the island at once. Mose will let you pass; for that handkerchief was dropped to tell him that you were abroad, and were to be got off against your will,

if you wouldn't go quietly. Both he and Andy will save you for my sake; the others won't, because they don't know you as we do. Please go, Master Gabriel, before it is too late."

"No, I shall stay. What would you think of me, if I deserted these helpless women in such danger, to save myself at their expense? I cannot quite trust you, Milly, after treachery like this."

"Who taught us to be treacherous, and left us nothing but our own cunning to help ourselves with?"

The first part of Gabriel's speech made the last less hard to bear: and Milly's question was put in a tone that was more apologetic than accusatory, for Gabriel cared what she thought of him, and that speech comforted her.

"Not I, Milly; but let the sins of the dead rest, and tell me if you will not help my mother and Grace and Clara off, instead of me? The promise will be all the sooner and the better kept, or, if it comes too late, I shall be the only and the fittest person to pay the penalty."

Milly's face darkened, and she turned away with an expression of keen disappointment. Mrs. Butler and her daughters had restrained their lamentations to listen; but at the sound of Gabriel's proposals, the sisters ran to Milly, and, clinging

about her knees, implored her to pity, forgive, and save them. Well for them that they did so; for Milly felt as if many degradations were cancelled by that act, and as she saw her young mistresses at her feet, the sense of power soothed her sore heart, and added the grace of generosity to the duty of forgiveness. She did not speak, yet she did not deny their prayer, and stood wavering between doubt and desire as the fateful moments rapidly flew by; Gabriel remembered that, and, taking her hand, said, in a voice whose earnestness was perilously persuasive to the poor girl's ears:

"Milly, you said there was no help for us unless God turned against you. I think He has, and, speaking through that generous heart of yours, pleads for us better than we can plead for ourselves. It is so beautiful to pity, so magnanimous to forgive; and the greater the wrong, the more pardon humbles the transgressor and ennobles the bestower. Dear Milly, spare these poor girls as you have been spared; prove yourself the truer woman, the nobler mistress; teach them a lesson which they never can forget, and sweeten your liberty with the memory of this act."

Milly listened still with downcast eyes and

averted face, but every word went straight to her heart, soothing, strengthening, inspiring all that was best and bravest in that poor heart, so passionate, and yet so warm and womanly withal. No man had ever spoken to her before of magnanimity, of proving herself superior to those who had shown no mercy to her faults, accorded no praise to her virtues, nor lightened a hard servitude with any touch of friendliness. No man had ever looked into her face before with eyes in which admiration for her beauty was mingled with pity for her helpless womanhood; and, better than all, no man, old or young, had ever until now recognized in her a fellow-creature, born to the same rights, gifted with the same powers, and capable of the same sufferings and sacrifices as himself. That touched and won her; that appealed to the spirit which lives through all oppression in the lowest of God's children; and through all her frame there went a glow of warmth and joy, as if some strong, kind hand had lifted her from the gloom of a desolate despair into the sunshine of a happier world. Her eye wandered toward the faces of dead master, conquered mistress, and darkened as it looked; passed to the pale girls still clinging to her skirts, and softened visibly; was lifted to Gabriel, and kindled with the new-born desire to

prove herself worthy of the confidence which would be her best reward. A smile broke beautifully across her face, and her lips were parted to reply, when Mrs. Butler, who sat trembling behind her, cried, in a shrill, imploring whisper:

"Remember all I've done for you, Milly, all I still have it in my power to do. I promise to free you, if you will only save us now. Be merciful, for your old master's sake, if not for mine."

The sound of that querulous voice seemed to sting Milly like a lash, threatening to undo all Gabriel's work. Her eye grew fiery again, her mouth hard, her face bitterly scornful, as she said, with a glance which her mistress never forgot:

"I'm not likely to forget all you've done for me. I would not accept my liberty from you if you could give it; and if a word of mine could save you, I'd not say it for old master's sake, much less for yours."

With a warning gesture to his mother, Gabriel turned that defiant face toward himself, and holding it firmly yet gently between his hands, bent on it a look that allayed the rising storm by the magic of a power which the young man had never used till now, though conscious of possessing it; for Milly's tell-tale countenance had betrayed her se-

cret long ago. As he looked deep into her eyes, with a glance which was both commanding and compassionate, they first fell with sudden shame, then, as if controlled by the power of those other eyes, they rose again and met them with a sad sincerity that made their beauty tragical, as they filled slowly, till two great tears rolled down her cheeks, wetting the hands that touched them; and when Gabriel said softly, "For my sake you will save us?" she straightway answered, "Yes."

"God bless you, Milly! Now tell me how I am to help you, for time is going, and lives hang on the minutes."

He released her as he spoke; and though she still looked at him as if he were the one saving power of her thwarted life, she answered, pleadingly:

"Hush, Master Gabriel! please don't speak to me, for then I only feel—now I must think."

How still the room grew as they waited! The presence of death was less solemn than that of fear, for the dead seemed forgotten, and the living all unconscious of the awesome contrast between the pale expectancy of their panic-stricken faces and the repose of that one untroubled countenance. How suddenly the night grew full of ominous sounds! How intently all eyes were fixed

upon the beautiful woman who stood among them holding their lives in her hands! and how they started when, through the hush, came a soft chime as the half-hour struck! Milly heard and answered that silvery sound as the anxious watchers would have had her:

"It can be done," she said, in a tone which carried hope to every heart. "It can be done, but I must do it alone, for I can pass Mose and get Andy across the river without their suspecting that I'm going for help. You must stay here and do your best to guard the ladies, Master Gabriel; it won't be safe for any of you to go now."

"But, Milly, the boys may not wait till twelve, or you may be delayed, and then we are lost."

"I have thought of that; and as I go out I'll take old Sandra with me; she'll understand in a minute. She'll go down to the mill and talk to them and keep them, if anything can do it, for they love and fear her more than anyone on the island. Be quiet, trust to me, and I'll save you, Master Gabriel."

He silently held out his hand, as if pledging his word to obey and trust. With the warmth and grace of her impulsive temperament, Milly bent her head, laid her cheek against that friendly hand, wet it with grateful tears, kissed it with

loving lips, and went her way, feeling as if all things were possible to her for Gabriel's sake.

Listening breathlessly, they heard her foot-falls die away, heard Sandra's voice below, a short parley with Mose, then watched the old woman and the young depart in opposite directions, leaving them to feel the bitterness of dependence in a strange, stern fashion, which they had never thought to know. Man-like, Gabriel could not long stand idle while danger menaced and women faced it for him. Anxious to take such precautions as might hold the expected assailants at bay, even for a moment, he bade his mother and sisters remain quiet, that no suspicion might be excited, and crept down to test the capabilities of the house to withstand a short siege, if other hopes failed. The slight, many-doored and windowed mansion, built for a brief occupancy when the winter months rendered the region habitable for whites, was but ill-prepared to repel any attack; and a hasty survey convinced Gabriel that it was both hazardous and vain to attempt a barricade which a few strong arms could instantly destroy. As he stood disheartened, unharmed, and alone in the long hall, dimly lighted by the lamp he carried, a sense of utter desolation came over him, dampening his courage, and oppressing his mind with the

dreariest forebodings. Thinking of the many true hearts and stout arms far away there at the North, which would have come to his aid so readily could his need have been known, he yearned for a single friend, a single weapon, that he might conquer or die like a man. And both were given him.

Pausing before a door that opened out upon the rear of the house, his eye caught sight of a heavy whip, whose loaded handle had felled men before now, and might easily do so again, if wielded by a strong arm. He took it down, saying to himself, "It is the first time I ever touched the accursed thing; God grant that it may be the last." A low sound behind him caused the blood to chill an instant in his veins, then to rush on with a quicker flow, as, poising the weapon in one hand, he lifted the lamp above his head, and searched the gloom. Far at the other end of the long hall a dark figure crept along, and a pair of glittering eyes were fixed upon his own. "Come on; I'm ready;" he said, steadily, and was answered by the patter of rapid steps, the sight of an unexpected ally, as a great black hound came leaping upon him in a rapture of canine delight. Old Mort had been the fiercest, most efficient blood-hound on the island; and still, in spite of age, was a formidable beast, ready to track or

assault a negro, and pull him down or throttle him, at word of command. He had been his possessor's favourite till Gabriel came; then he deserted the old master for the young, and was always left at large when he was at home. Mort had been missing all day, and now the rope trailing behind him was sufficient evidence that he had been decoyed away, lest his vigilance should warn his master, and that, having freed himself, he had stolen home, to lie concealed till night and his master's presence reassured him.

As the great creature reared himself before the young man, with a paw on either shoulder, and looked into his face with eyes that seemed almost human in their intelligent affection, Gabriel dropped the whip, put down the lamp, and caressed the hound with an almost boyish gratitude and fondness; for, with the sense of security this powerful ally brought, there came a remorseful memory, that though the possessor of two hundred beings, he had no friend but a dog. At this point Mort suddenly pricked up his ears, slipped from his master's hold, and snuffed suspiciously at the closed door. Some one was evidently without, and the creature's keen scent detected the unseen listener. With a noiseless command to the dog to keep quiet, Gabriel caught up his only weapon, and

stood waiting for whatever demonstration should follow. None came; and presently Mort returned to him with a sagacious glance and a sleepy yawn, sure evidences that Mose had paused a moment in his round, and had gone on again. Big Mose was, with one exception, the strongest, most rebellious slave on the place; and though Gabriel had longed to rush out and attack him, he had not dared to try it, for his strength was as a child's compared to the stalwart slave's. Now, with Mort to help him, the thing was possible: and as he stood there, with only a door between him and the man who had sworn to take his life, a strange consciousness of power came to him; his muscles seemed to grow firm as iron, his blood flowed calm and cool, and in his mind there rose a purpose, desperately simple, yet wise, despite its seeming rashness. He would master Mose, and leaving Mort to guard him, would go down to the mill, and, if both Sandra's and his own appeals and promises proved unavailing, would give himself up, hoping that his death or torture would delay the doom of those defenceless women, and give Milly time to bring them better help than any he could give. Some atonement must be made, he thought, and perhaps innocent blood would wash the black stain from his father's memory better than the

deed he had hoped to do in that father's name on the morrow. He had held a precious opportunity in his hands, had delayed through a mistaken kindness; now it was lost, perhaps for ever, and he must pay the costly price which God exacts of those who palter with their consciences. As the thought came, and the purpose grew, it brought with it that high courage, that entire self-abnegation which we call heroism; and that fateful moment made Gabriel a man.

A word, a gesture, put the dog upon his mettle; then cutting away the long rope, Gabriel threw it over his arm, unbarred the door, set it ajar, and, standing behind it, with the hound under his hand, he waited for Mose to make his round. Soon Mort's restless ears gave token of his approach; and, as the stealthy steps came stealing on, he was with difficulty restrained; for now instinct showed him danger, and he was as eager as his master to be up and doing. The streak of light attracted the man's eye. He paused, drew nearer, listened; then softly pushed the door open, and leaned in to reconnoitre. That instant Mort was on him, a heavy blow half stunned him, and, before his scattered wits could be collected, he was down, his hands fast bound, and both master and dog standing over him panting, but unhurt.

"Now, Mose, if you want to save your life, be still, and answer my questions truly," said Gabriel, with one hand on the man's throat, the other holding back Mort, whose tawny eye was savage now. "I know your plot, and have found means to spoil it. How do you think I'm going to punish you all?"

"Dun'no, massa," muttered Mose, with a grim resignation to any fate.

"I'm going to free every man, woman, and child on the island, and fling that devilish thing into the river," he said, as he spurned the whip with his foot.

An incredulous look and derisive grin was the only thanks and answer he received.

"You don't believe it? Well, who can blame you, poor soul? Not I. Now tell me how many men are on the watch between here and the rice-mill?" Gabriel spoke with a flash of the eye and a sudden deepening of the voice; for both indignation and excitement stirred him. The look, the tone, did more to convince Mose than a flood of words; for he had learned to try men by tests of his own, and had more faith in the promises of their faces than those of their tongues. More respectfully, he said,—

"No one, 'sides me, massa. Andy's at de

landin', and de rest at de mill 'ceptin' dem as isn't in de secret."

"Mind, no lies, Mose, or your free papers will be the last I sign to-morrow. Get up and come quietly with me; for if you try to run, Mort will pin you. I'm going to the mill, and want you safely under lock and key first."

"Is massa gwine alone?" asked Mose, glancing about him, for Gabriel spoke as if he had a score of men at his command.

"Yes, I'm going alone. Why not?"

"Massa know's dere's fifty of de boys dar sworn to kill him, if Milly don't git him 'way 'fore dey comes up?"

"I know, and Milly's done her best to get me off, but I'd rather stay; I'm not afraid."

Gabriel's blood was up now: danger had no terrors for him; and, beyond the excitement of the moment, his purpose lent him a calm courage which impressed the slave as something superhuman. Like one in a maze of doubt and fear, he obediently followed his master to an out-house, where, binding feet as well as hands, Gabriel left him with the promise and the warning:

"Sit here till I come to let you out a free man, if I live to do it. Don't stir nor call, for Mort will be at the door to silence you and howl for me,

if you try any tricks. I'll not keep you long if I can help it."

The slave only stared dumbly at him, incapable of receiving the vast idea of liberty, pardon, and kindness all at once; and bidding Mort guard both prisoner and house, Gabriel stole along the path that wound away through grove and garden to the rice-mill, where so many fates were soon to be decided. As he went he glanced from earth to sky, and found propitious omens everywhere. No flowery thicket concealed a lurking foe to clutch at him in the dark; but the fragrance of trodden grass, the dewy touch of leaves against his cheek, the peaceful night-sounds that surrounded him, gave him strange comfort and encouragement; for, when his fellow-creatures had deserted, Nature took him to her motherly heart. From above, fitful glimpses of the moon guided him on his perilous way; for the wind had changed, the black clouds were driving seaward, and the storm was passing without either thunderbolt or hurricane. Coming at length within sight of the half-ruined mill, he paused to reconnoitre. Through chinks in the rude walls a dim light shone, muffled voices rose and fell; and once there was a hoarse sound, as of a half-uttered shout. Creeping warily to a dark nook among the ruins, Gabriel made his way

to a crevice in an inner wall, and looking through it, saw a sight little fitted to reassure him, either as a master or a man.

The long, low-rafted portion of the mill, which once had been the threshing-floor, was now lighted by the red glare of several torches, which filled the place with weird shadows, and sudden glimpses of objects that seemed the more mysterious or terrible for being but half seen. In one corner, under a coarse covering, something lay stark and still; a clenched hand was visible, and several locks of light hair dabbled with blood, but nothing more. Fifty men, old and young, of all shades of colour, all types of their unhappy race, stood or sat about three, who evidently were the leaders of the league. One, a young man, so fair that the red lines across his shoulders looked doubly barbarous there, was half-kneeling, and steadily filing at a chain that held his feet together as his hands had been held till some patient friend had freed them, and left him to finish the slow task. He worked so eagerly that the drops stood thick upon his haggard face, and his scarred chest heaved with his painful breath; for this was the Tony who was too much cut up with his last whipping to run on Mrs. Butler's errand, but not too feeble to strike a blow for liberty. The second man was

as near an animal as a human creature could become, and yet be recognized as such. A burly, brutal-looking negro, maimed and distorted by every cruelty that could be invented or inflicted, he was a sight to daunt the stoutest heart, as he sat sharpening the knife which had often threatened him in the overseer's hand, and was still red with the overseer's blood.

Standing erect between the two, and in striking contrast to them, was a gigantic man, with a fine, dark face, a noble head, and the limbs of an ebony Hercules. A native African, from one of those tribes whose wills are never broken,—who can be subdued by kindness, but who often kill themselves rather than suffer the degradation of the lash. No one had dared to subject him to that chastisement, as was proved by the unmarred smoothness of the muscular body, bare to the waist; but round his neck was riveted an iron collar, with four curved spikes. It was a shameful badge of serfdom; it prevented him from lying down, it galled him with its ceaseless chafing, yet he wore it with an air which would have made the hideous necklace seem some barbaric ornament, if that had been possible; and faced the excited crowd with a native dignity which nothing could destroy, and which proved him their

master in intelligence, as well as strength and courage.

Before them all, yet lifted a little above them by her position on a fallen fragment of the roof, stood old Cassandra. A tall, gaunt woman, with a countenance which age, in making venerable, had not robbed of its vigour; her sightless eyes were wide open with a weird effect of seeing without sight, and her high white turban, her long staff, and the involuntary tremor of her shrivelled hands, gave her the air of some ancient sorceress or priestess, bearing her part in some heathen rite. The majestic-looking slave with the collar had apparently been speaking, for his face was turned toward her, and his dark features were still alive with the emotions which had just found vent in words. As Gabriel looked, old Sandra struck the floor with her staff, as if commanding silence; and, as the stir of some momentary outbreak subsided, she said, in a strong voice, which rose and fell in a sort of solemn chant as her earnestness increased and her listeners grew obedient to its spell:

"Chil'en, I'se heerd yer plans,—now I wants ter len' a han' and help you in dis hour of tribbleation. You's killed oberseer Neal, and d'rectly you's all gwine up ter de house to kill massa,

missis and de young folks. Now what's you gwine to do dat fer? and what's dey eber done bad nuf ter make you willin' ter fro 'way yer souls dis night?"

"Kase we can't b'ar no more." "Old massa hunted my boy wid hounds and dey tore him ter def." "He sold my chil'en and drove Rachel crazy wid de partin'." "Old missis had my pore girl whipped kase she was too sick ter stan' and dress her." "Massa Gabriel may be harder dan de ole one, and we's tired ob hell."

These, and many other short, stern answers came to Sandra's question; she expected them, was ready to meet them, and knew how best to reach the outraged hearts now hungering for vengeance. Her well-known afflictions, her patience, her piety, gave a certain sanctity to her presence, great weight to her words, and an almost marvellous power to her influence over her own people, who believed her to be half saint, half seer. She felt her power, and, guided by an instinct that seldom failed, she used it wisely in this perilous hour, remembering that her listeners, though men in their passions, were children in their feelings.

"You pore boys, I knows de troof ob all dat, and I'se had my trubbles hard and heavy as you

has, but I'se learnt to fergib 'em, and dey don't hurt now. Ole massa bought me thirty year ago 'way from all I keered fer, and I'se slaved fer him widout no t'anks, no wages, eber since; but I'se fergived him dat. He sole my chil'en, all ten; my boys up de riber, my perty little girls down to Orleans, and bringed up his chil'en on de money; dat come bery hard, but de Lord helped me, and I fergived him dat. He shot my ole Ben kase he couldn't whip me hisself, nor stan' by and see it done; dad mos' broke my heart, but in de end I foun' I could fergib him one time more. He made me nuss him when de fever come and every one was 'fraid ob him; de long watchin', de hard work and de cryin' fer my chil'en made me bline at last; but I fergived him dat right hearty, fer though dey took my eyes away dey couldn't bline my soul, and in de darkness I hab seen de Lord."

The truth, the pathos, the devout assurance of her words, impressed and controlled the sympathetic creatures to whom she spoke, as no reproach or denunciation would have done. A murmur went through the crowd, and more than one savage face lost something of its brutality, gained something of its former sad patience, as the old woman touched with wondrous skill the chords that still made music in these tried and tempted hearts.

"Yes, chil'en, I hab seen de Lord, and He has made de night into day fer me, has held me up in all my trubbles, tole me to hole fas' by Him, and promised He would bring me safe ter glory. I'se faith to feel He will, and while I wait, I'se savin' up my soul fer Him. Boys, He says de same to you froo me; He says hole fas', b'ar all dat's sent, beleebe in Him, and wait de coming ob de Lord."

"We's done tired a-watin', de Lord's so bery long a comin', Sandra."

It was a weary hopeless voice that answered, as an old man shook his white head and lifted up the dim eyes that for eighty years had watched in vain.

"It's you dats long a-comin' ter Him, Uncle Dave, but He ain't tired ob watin' fer yer. De places dar in heaven is all ready, de shinin' gowns, the harps ob gole, de eberlastin' glory, and de peace. No rice-swamps dar, no sugar-mills, no cotton-fields, no houn's, no oberseer, no massa but de blessed Lord. Dar's yer chil'en, Uncle Dave, growed beautiful white angels, and a-watin' till yer comes. Dar's yer wife, Pete, wid no lashes on her back, no sobbin' in her heart, a-watin' fer yer, anxious. Dar's yer fader, Jake; he don't need no proppin' now, and he'll run to meet yer when yer

comes. Dar's yer pore sister Rachel, Ned; she ain't crying fer baby now; de Lord's got her in de holler of His han', and she's a-waitin' fer de little one and you to come. Dar's my Ben, my chil'en all saved up for me, and when I comes I'll see 'em watin' fer me at de door. But, best ob all, dar's de dear Lord watin' fer us; He's holdin' out his arms, He's beckonin' all de while, He's sayin' in dat lovin' voice ob His, 'I sees yer sorrows, my pore chil'en, I hears yer sobbin' and yer prayers, I fergives yer sins, I knows yer wont 'spoint me of dese yere fifty precious souls, and I'se a-watin, watin', watin', fer yer all.'"

Strange fervour was in the woman's darkened face, strange eloquence in her aged voice, strange power in the persuasive gestures in her withered hands outstretched above them, warning, pleading, beckoning, as if, in truth, the Lord spoke through her, illuminating that poor place with the light of His divine compassion, the promises of His divine salvation. A dead silence followed as the last yearning cadence of the one voice rose, fell, and died away. Sandra let the strong contrast between the here and the hereafter make its due impression, then broke the silence, saying briefly, solemnly:

"Boys, de Lord has spared you one great sin dis night; ole massa's dead."

"Glory be to God, amen!" "Halleluyer! dat I'se libed ter see dis happy day!" "De Debble's got him, shore!" "Don't give up the chance, boys; young massa and de missis is left for us."

Such exclamations of gratitude, joy, and revenge, were the only demonstration which the news produced, and mingling with them, a gust of wind came sweeping through the mill, as if nature gave a long sigh of relief that another tyrant had ceased to blight and burthen her fair domain. Sandra's quick ear caught the last words, and a deep oath or two, as several men rose with the fierce fire rekindling in their eyes.

"Yes!" she cried, in a tone that held them even against their will,—"yes, young massa's lef'; but not to die, for if you gives up your chance of damnation dis night, you'll all be free to-morrer. He's promised it; he'll do it, and dere'll be no blood but dat bad man's yonder, to cry from de groun', and b'ar witness 'ginst yer at de Judgment-day."

"Free to-morrer! Who's gwine to b'lieve dat, Sandra? We's been tole such stories often; but the morrer's never come, and now we're gwine to bring one for ourselves."

The gigantic man with the spiked collar on his neck said that, with a smile of grim determination,

as he took up an iron bar, which in his desperate hands became a terribly formidable weapon.

A low growl as of muttering thunder, answered him, and Sandra's heart sunk within her. But one hope remained; and, desperately clinging to it, she found that even in these betrayed, benighted creatures there still lived a sense of honour, a loyalty to truth, born of the manhood God had given them, the gratitude which one man had inspired.

"Hear me, jes once more, 'for you goes, boys. Tell me, what has young massa done ter make yer want his blood? Has he ever lashed yer, kicked, or cussed yer? Has he sole yer chil'en, 'bused yer wives, or took yer ole folks from yer? Has he done anything but try to make ole massa kinder, to do his best fer us while he's here; and when he can't do nor b'ar no more, don't he go 'way to pray de Lord ter help us fer His sake?"

Not a voice answered; not one complaint, accusation, or reproach was made, and Prince, the fierce leader of the insurrection, paused, with his foot upon the threshold of the door; for a grateful memory confronted and arrested him. One little daughter, the last of many children, had been taken from him to be sold, when Gabriel moved by his despair, had bought and freed and given her back to him, with the promise that she never

should be torn from him again. For an instant the clasp of little clinging arms seemed to make the sore chafing of the iron ring unfelt; the touch of the hand that gave the precious gift now made that rude weapon weigh heavily in his own, and from the darkness which lay between him and the doomed home there seemed to rise the shadow of the face which once had looked compassionately into his and recognized him as a man. He turned, and, standing with his magnificent yet mournful figure fully revealed by the red flicker of the torches, put out one hand as if to withhold the desperate crowd before him, and asked, with an air of authority which well became a prince by birth as well as name:

"Sandra, who tole you massa ment ter free us right away? You has blessed dreams sometimes, and maybe dis is one ob 'em. It's too good to be de troof."

"It is de troof, de livin' troof, and no dream ob mine was eber half so blessed as dis yere will be, if we has faith. Milly tole me jes now dat Massa Gabriel swore before de Lord and his dead father dat he'd free us all ter-morrer; and I come here ter save yer from de sin dat won't help, but hinder yer awful in dis world and de next. Dere's more good news 'sides dat. I heerd 'em talkin'

'bout de Norf. It's risin', boys, it's risin'!—de tings we's heerd is shore, and de day ob jubilee is comin' fas'."

It was well she added that last hope, for its effect was wonderful. Men lifted up their heads, hope quenched hatred in eyes that grew joyfully expectant, and for a moment the black sky seemed to glimmer with the first rays of the North star which should lead them up from that Dismal Swamp to a goodly land. Sandra felt the change, knew that only one more effective touch was needed to secure the victory, and, like the pious soul she was, turned in her hour of need to the only Friend who never had deserted her. Painfully bending her stiff knees, she knelt down before them, folded her hard hands, lifted her sightless eyes, and cried, in an agony of supplication:

"Dear Lord, speak to dese yere pore chil'en, fer I'se done my bes'! Help 'em, save 'em, don't let 'em spile de freedom dat's comin' by a sin like dis to-night, but let 'em take it sweet and clean from Thy han' in de mornin'. Stan' by young massa, hole him up, don't let him 'spoint us, fer we'se ben bery patient, Lord; and help us to wait one night more, shore dat he'll keep de promise fer Thy blessed sake."

"I will!"

The voice rang through the place like a voice from heaven; and out from the darkness Gabriel came among them. To their startled, superstitious eyes he seemed no mortal man, but a beautiful, benignant angel, bringing tidings of great joy, as he stood there, armed with no weapon but a righteous purpose, gifted with no eloquence but the truth, stirred to his heart's core by strong emotion, and lifted above himself by the high mood born of that memorable hour.

"My people—mine only while I speak—break up your league, lay down your arms, dry your tears, and forgive as you are forgiven, for this island no longer holds a master or a slave; but all are free for ever and for ever."

An awful silence fell upon the place, unbroken till old Sandra cried, with a glad, triumphant voice:

"Chil'en! de Lord hab heerd, de Lord hab answered! Bless de Lord! oh, bless de Lord!"

Then as a strong wind bows a field of grain, the breath of liberty swept over fifty souls, and down upon their knees fell fifty free men, while a great cry went up to heaven. Shouts, sobs, prayers, and praises; the clash of falling arms; the rattle of fetters wrenched away; the rush of men gathered to each other's breasts; all added to

the wild abandonment of a happiness too mighty for adequate expression, as that wave of gratitude and love rolled up and broke at Gabriel's feet. With face hidden in his hands he stood; and while his heart sung for joy, tears from the deepest fountains of a man's repentant spirit fitly baptized the freedmen, who, clinging to his garments, kissing his feet, and pouring blessings on his head, bestowed upon him a far nobler inheritance than that which he had lost.

"Hark!"

The word, and Sandra's uplifted hand, hushed the tumultuous thanksgiving, as if she were in truth the magician they believed her. A far-off murmur of many voices, the tramp of many feet was heard; all knew what it portended, yet none trembled, none fled; for a mightier power than either force or fear had conquered, and the victory was already won.

Through widening rifts in the stormy sky the moon broke clear and calm, gliding, like a visible benediction, from the young man's bent head to the dusky faces lifted toward the promised light; and in that momentary hush, solemn and sweet, across the river, a distant clock struck twelve.

My Contraband.

DOCTOR FRANCK came in as I sat sewing up the rents in an old shirt, that Tom might go tidily to his grave. New shirts were needed for the living, and there was no wife or mother to "dress him handsome when he went to meet the Lord," as one woman said, describing the fine funeral she had pinched herself to give her son.

"Miss Dane, I'm in a quandary," began the Doctor, with that expression of countenance which says as plainly as words, "I want to ask a favour, but I wish you'd save me the trouble."

"Can I help you out of it?"

"Faith! I don't like to propose it, but you certainly can, if you please."

"Then name it, I beg."

"You see a Reb has just been brought in crazy with typhoid; a bad case every way; a drunken, rascally little captain somebody took the trouble to capture, but whom nobody wants to take the trouble to cure. The wards are full, the ladies worked to death, and willing to be for our own boys, but rather slow to risk their lives for a Reb. Now, you've had the fever, you like queer patients, your mate will see to your ward for a while, and I will find you a good attendant. The fellow won't last long, I fancy; but he can't die without some sort of care, you know. I've put him in the fourth story of the west wing, away from the rest. It is airy, quiet, and comfortable there. I'm on that ward, and will do my best for you in every way. Now, then, will you go?"

"Of course I will, out of perversity, if not common charity; for some of these people think that because I'm an abolitionist I am also a heathen, and I should rather like to show them that, though I cannot quite love my enemies, I am willing to take care of them."

"Very good; I thought you'd go; and speaking of abolition reminds me that you can have a contraband for servant, if you like. It is that fine mulatto fellow who was found burying his rebel master after the fight, and, being badly cut over

the head, our boys brought him along. Will you have him?"

"By all means, for I'll stand to my guns on that point, as on the other; these black boys are far more faithful and handy than some of the white scamps given me to serve, instead of being served by. But is this man well enough?"

"Yes, for that sort of work, and I think you'll like him. He must have been a handsome fellow before he got his face slashed; not much darker than myself; his master's son, I dare say, and the white blood makes him rather high and haughty about some things. He was in a bad way when he came in, but vowed he'd die in the street rather than turn in with the black fellows below; so I put him up in the west wing, to be out of the way, and he's seen to the captain all the morning. When can you go up?"

"As soon as Tom is laid out, Skinner moved, Haywood washed, Marble dressed, Charley rubbed, Downs taken up, Upham laid down, and the whole forty fed."

We both laughed, though the Doctor was on his way to the deadhouse, and I held a shroud on my lap. But in a hospital one learns that cheerfulness is one's salvation; for, in an atmosphere of suffering and death, heaviness of heart would

soon paralyze usefulness of hand, if the blessed gift of smiles had been denied us.

In an hour I took possession of my new charge, finding a dissipated-looking boy of nineteen or twenty raving in the solitary little room, with no one near him but the contraband in the room adjoining. Feeling decidedly more interest in the black man than in the white, yet remembering the Doctor's hint of his being "high and haughty," I glanced furtively at him as I scattered chloride of lime about the room to purify the air, and settled matters to suit myself. I had seen many contrabands, but never one so attractive as this. All coloured men are called "boys," even if their heads are white; this boy was five-and-twenty at least, strong-limbed and manly, and had the look of one who never had been cowed by abuse or worn with oppressive labour. He sat on his bed doing nothing; no book, no pipe, no pen or paper anywhere appeared, yet anything less indolent or listless than his attitude and expression I never saw. Erect he sat, with a hand on either knee, and eyes fixed on the bare wall opposite, so rapt in some absorbing thought as to be unconscious of my presence, though the door stood wide open and my movements were by no means noiseless. His face was half averted, but I instantly approved the

Doctor's taste, for the profile which I saw possessed all the attributes of comeliness belonging to his mixed race. He was more quadroon than mulatto, with Saxon features, Spanish complexion darkened by exposure, colour in lips and cheek, waving hair, and an eye full of the passionate melancholy which in such men always seems to utter a mute protest against the broken law that doomed them at their birth. What could he be thinking of? The sick boy cursed and raved, I rustled to and fro, steps passed the door, bells rang, and the steady rumble of army-waggons came up from the street, still he never stirred. I had seen coloured people in what they call "the black sulks," when for days they neither smiled nor spoke, and scarcely ate. But this was something more than that; for the man was not dully brooding over some small grievance; he seemed to see an all-absorbing fact or fancy recorded on the wall, which was a blank to me. I wondered if it were some deep wrong or sorrow, kept alive by memory and impotent regret; if he mourned for the dead master to whom he had been faithful to the end; or if the liberty now his were robbed of half its sweetness by the knowledge that some one near and dear to him still languished in the hell from which he had escaped. My heart quite

warmed to him at that idea. I wanted to know and comfort him; and, following the impulse of the moment, I went in and touched him on the shoulder.

In an instant the man vanished and the slave appeared. Freedom was too new a boon to have wrought its blessed changes yet; and as he started up, with his hand at his temple, and an obsequious "Yes, missis," any romance that had gathered round him fled away, leaving the saddest of all sad facts in living guise before me. Not only did the manhood seem to die out of him, but the comeliness that first attracted me; for, as he turned, I saw the ghastly wound that had laid open cheek and forehead. Being partly healed, it was no longer bandaged, but held together with strips of that transparent plaster which I never see without a shiver, and swift recollections of the scenes with which it is associated in my mind. Part of his black hair had been shorn away, and one eye was nearly closed; pain so distorted, and the cruel sabre-cut so marred, that portion of his face, that when I saw it I felt as if a fine medal had been suddenly reversed, showing me a far more striking type of human suffering and wrong than Michael Angelo's bronze prisoner. By one of those inexplicable processes that often teach us

how little we understand ourselves, my purpose was suddenly changed: and though I went in to offer comfort as a friend, I merely gave an order as a mistress.

"Will you open these windows? this man needs more air."

He obeyed at once, and, as he slowly urged up the unruly sash, the handsome profile was again turned towards me, and again I was possessed by my first impression so strongly that I involuntarily said:

"Thank you."

Perhaps it was fancy, but I thought that in the look of mingled surprise and something like reproach which he gave me, there was also a trace of grateful pleasure. But he said in that tone of spiritless humility these poor souls learn so soon:

"I isn't a white man, missis, I'se a contraband."

"Yes, I know it; but a contraband is a free man, and I heartily congratulate you."

He liked that; his face shone, he squared his shoulders, lifted his head, and looked me full in the eye with a brisk:

"Thank ye, missis; anything more to do fer yer?"

"Doctor Franck thought you would help me

with this man, as there are many patients, and few nurses or attendants. Have you had the fever?"

"No, missis."

"They should have thought of that when they put him here; wounds and fevers should not be together. I'll try to get you moved."

He laughed a sudden laugh: if he had been a white man, I should have called it scornful; as he was a few shades darker than myself, I suppose it must be considered an insolent, or at least an unmannerly one.

"It don't matter, missis. I'd rather be up here with the fever than down with those niggers; and there isn't no other place fer me."

Poor fellow! that was true. No ward in all the hospital would take him in to lie side by side with the most miserable white wreck there. Like the bat in Æsop's fable, he belonged to neither race; and the pride of one, and the helplessness of the other, kept him hovering alone in the twilight a great sin has brought to overshadow the whole land.

"You shall stay, then; for I would far rather have you than my lazy Jack. But are you well and strong enough?"

"I guess I'll do, missis."

He spoke with a passive sort of acquiescence

—as if it did not much matter if he were not able, and no one would particularly rejoice if he were.

"Yes, I think you will. By what name shall I call you?"

"Bob, missis."

Every woman has her pet whim; one of mine was to teach the men self-respect by treating them respectfully. Tom, Dick, and Harry would pass, when lads rejoiced in those familiar abbreviations; but to address men often old enough to be my father in that style did not suit my old-fashioned ideas of propriety. This "Bob" would never do; I should have found it as easy to call the chaplain "Gus" as my tragical-looking contraband by a title so strongly associated with the tale of a kite.

"What is your other name?" I asked. "I like to call my attendants by their last names rather than by their first."

"I'se got no other, missis; we has our masters' names, or do without. Mine's dead, and I won't have anything of his 'bout me."

"Well, I'll call you Robert, then, and you may fill this pitcher for me, if you will be so kind."

He went; but, through all the tame obedience years of servitude had taught him, I could see

that the proud spirit his father gave him was not yet subdued, for the look and gesture with which he repudiated his master's name were a more effective declaration of independence than any Fourth-of-July orator could have prepared.

We spent a curious week together. Robert seldom left his room, except upon my errands; and I was a prisoner all day, often all night, by the bedside of the rebel. The fever burned itself rapidly away, for there seemed little vitality to feed it in the feeble frame of this old young man, whose life had been none of the most righteous, judging from the revelations made by his unconscious lips; since more than once Robert authoritatively silenced him, when my gentler hushings were of no avail, and blasphemous wanderings or ribald camp-songs made my cheeks burn and Robert's face assume an aspect of disgust. The captain was a gentleman in the world's eye, but the contraband was the gentleman in mine;—I was a fanatic, and that accounts for such depravity of taste, I hope. I never asked Robert of himself, feeling that somewhere there was a spot still too sore to bear the lightest touch; but, from his language, manner, and intelligence, I inferred that his colour had procured for him the few advantages within the reach of a quick-witted, kindly-treated

slave. Silent, grave, and thoughtful, but most serviceable, was my contraband; glad of the books I brought him, faithful in the performance of the duties I assigned to him, grateful for the friendliness I could not but feel and show toward him. Often I longed to ask what purpose was so visibly altering his aspect with such daily deepening gloom. But I never dared, and no one else had either time or desire to pry into the past of this specimen of one branch of the chivalrous "F. F. Vs."

On the seventh night, Dr. Franck suggested that it would be well for some one, besides the general watchman of the yard, to be with the captain, as it might be his last. Although the greater part of the two preceding nights had been spent there, of course I offered to remain—for there is a strange fascination in these scenes, which renders one careless of fatigue and unconscious of fear until the crisis is past.

"Give him water as long as he can drink, and if he drops into a natural sleep it may save him. I'll look in at midnight, when some change will probably take place. Nothing but sleep or a miracle will keep him now. Good-night."

Away went the Doctor; and, devouring a whole mouthful of gapes, I lowered the lamp, wet

the captain's head, and sat down on a hard stool to begin my watch. The captain lay with his hot, haggard face turned toward me, filling the air with his poisonous breath, and feebly muttering, with lips and tongue so parched that the sanest speech would have been difficult to understand. Robert was stretched on his bed in the inner room, the door of which stood ajar, that a fresh draught from his open window might carry the fever-fumes away through mine. I could just see a long, dark figure, with the lighter outline of a face, and, having little else to do just then, I fell to thinking of this curious contraband, who evidently prized his freedom highly, yet seemed in no haste to enjoy it. Dr. Franck had offered to send him on to safer quarters, but he had said, "No, thank yer, sir, not yet," and then had gone away to fall into one of those black moods of his, which began to disturb me, because I had no power to lighten them. As I sat listening to the clocks from the steeples all about us, I amused myself with planning Robert's future, as I often did my own, and had dealt out to him a generous hand of trumps wherewith to play this game of life which hitherto had gone so cruelly against him, when a harsh choked voice called:

"Lucy!"

It was the captain, and some new terror seemed to have gifted him with momentary strength.

"Yes, here's Lucy," I answered, hoping that by following the fancy I might quiet him—for his face was damp with the clammy moisture, and his frame shaken with the nervous tremor that so often precedes death. His dull eye fixed upon me, dilating with a bewildered look of incredulity and wrath, till he broke out fiercely:

"That's a lie! she's dead—and so's Bob."

Finding speech a failure, I began to sing the quiet tune that had often soothed delirium like this; but hardly had the line—

"See gentle patience smile on pain,"

passed my lips, when he clutched me by the wrist, whispering like one in mortal fear:

"Hush! she used to sing that way to Bob, but she never would to me. I swore I'd whip the devil out of her, and I did; but you know before she cut her throat she said she'd haunt me, and there she is!"

He pointed behind me with an aspect of such pale dismay, that I involuntarily glanced over my shoulder and started as if I had had seen a veritable ghost: for, peering from the gloom of that

inner room, I saw a shadowy face, with dark hair all about it, and a glimpse of scarlet at the throat. An instant showed me that it was only Robert leaning from his bed's foot, wrapped in a grey army-blanket, with his red shirt just visible above it, and his long hair disordered by sleep. But what a strange expression was on his face! The unmarred side was toward me, fixed and motionless as when I first observed it—less absorbed now, but more intent. His eye glittered, his lips were apart like one who listened with every sense, and his whole aspect reminded me of a hound to which some wind had brought the scent of unsuspected prey.

"Do you know him, Robert? Does he mean you?"

"Law's, no, missis; they all own half-a-dozen Bobs: but hearin' my name woke me; that's all."

He spoke quite naturally, and lay down again, while I returned to my charge, thinking that this paroxysm was probably his last. But by another hour I perceived a hopeful change; for the tremor had subsided, the cold dew was gone, his breathing was more regular, and Sleep, the healer, had descended to save or take him gently away. Doctor Franck looked in at midnight, bade me keep

all cool and quiet, and not fail to administer a certain draught as soon as the captain woke. Very much relieved, I laid my head on my arms, uncomfortably folded on the little table, and fancied I was about to perform one of the feats which practice renders possible,—"sleeping with one eye open," as we say: a half-and-half doze, for all senses sleep but that of hearing; the faintest murmur, sigh, or motion will break it, and give one back one's wits much brightened by the brief permission to "stand at ease." On this night the experiment was a failure, for previous vigils, confinement, and much care had rendered naps a dangerous indulgence. Having roused half-a-dozen times in an hour to find all quiet, I dropped my heavy head on my arms, and, drowsily resolving to look up again in fifteen minutes, fell fast asleep.

The striking of a deep-voiced clock awoke me with a start. "That is one," thought I; but, to my dismay, two more strokes followed, and in remorseful haste I sprang up to see what harm my long oblivion had done. A strong hand put me back into my seat, and held me there. It was Robert. The instant my eye met his my heart began to beat, and all along my nerves tingled that electric flash which foretells a danger that we can-

not see. He was very pale, his mouth grim, and both eyes full of sombre fire; for even the wounded one was open now, all the more sinister for the deep scar above and below. But his touch was steady, his voice quiet, as he said:

"Sit still, missis; I won't hurt yer, nor scare yer, ef I can help it, but yer waked too soon."

"Let me go, Robert,—the captain is stirring,—I must give him something."

"No, missis, yer can't stir an inch. Look here!"

Holding me with one hand, with the other he took up the glass in which I had left the draught, and showed me it was empty.

"Has he taken it?" I asked, more and more bewildered.

"I flung it out o' window, missis; he'll have to do without."

"But why, Robert? why did you do it?"

"'Kase I hate him!"

Impossible to doubt the truth of that; his whole face showed it, as he spoke through his set teeth, and launched a fiery glance at the unconscious captain. I could only hold my breath and stare blankly at him, wondering what mad act was coming next. I suppose I shook and turned white, as women have a foolish habit of doing

when sudden danger daunts them; for Robert released my arm, sat down upon the bedside just in front of me, and said, with the ominous quietude that made me cold to see and hear:

"Don't yer be frightened, missis; don't try to run away, fer the door's locked and the key in my pocket; don't yer cry out, for yer'd have to scream a long while, with my hand on yer mouth, 'efore yer was heard. Be still, an' I'll tell yer what I'm gwine to do."

"Lord help us! he has taken the fever in some sudden, violent way, and is out of his head. I must humour him till some one comes"; in pursuance of which swift determination, I tried to say, quite composedly:

"I will be still and hear you; but open the window. Why did you shut it?"

"I'm sorry I can't do it, missis; but yer'd jump out, or call, if I did, an' I'm not ready yet. I shut it to make yer sleep, an' heat would do it quicker'n anything else I could do."

The captain moved, and feebly muttered "Water!" Instinctively I rose to give it to him, but the heavy hand came down upon my shoulder, and in the same decided tone Robert said:

"The water went with the physic; let him call."

"Do let me go to him! he'll die without care!"

"I mean he shall;—don't yer meddle, if yer please, missis."

In spite of his quiet tone and respectful manner, I saw murder in his eyes, and turned faint with fear; yet the fear excited me, and, hardly knowing what I did, I seized the hands that had seized me, crying:

"No, no; you shall not kill him! It is base to hurt a helpless man. Why do you hate him? He is not your master."

"He's my brother."

I felt that answer from head to foot, and seemed to fathom what was coming, with a prescience vague, but unmistakable. One appeal was left to me, and I made it.

"Robert, tell me what it means? Do not commit a crime and make me accessory to it. There is a better way of righting wrong than by violence;—let me help you find it."

My voice trembled as I spoke, and I heard the frightened flutter of my heart; so did he, and if any little act of mine had ever won affection or respect from him, the memory of it served me then. He looked down, and seemed to put some question to himself; whatever it was, the answer

was in my favour, for when his eyes rose again, they were gloomy, but not desperate.

"I *will* tell yer, missis; but mind, this makes no difference; the boy is mine. I'll give the Lord a chance to take him fust: if He don't, I shall."

"Oh, no! remember he is your brother."

An unwise speech; I felt it as it passed my lips, for a black frown gathered on Robert's face, and his strong hands closed with an ugly sort of grip. But he did not touch the poor soul gasping there behind him, and seemed content to let the slow suffocation of that stifling room end his frail life.

"I'm not like to forgit dat, missis, when I've been thinkin' of it all this week. I knew him when they fetched him in, an' would 'a' done it long 'efore this, but I wanted to ask where Lucy was; he knows,—he told to-night,—an' now he's done for."

"Who is Lucy?" I asked, hurriedly, intent on keeping his mind busy with any thought but murder.

With one of the swift transitions of a mixed temperament like this, at my question Robert's deep eyes filled, the clenched hands were spread before his face, and all I heard were the broken words:

"My wife—he took her——"

In that instant every thought of fear was swallowed up in burning indignation for the wrong, and a perfect passion of pity for the desperate man so tempted to avenge an injury for which there seemed no redress but this. He was no longer slave or contraband, no drop of black blood marred him in my sight, but an infinite compassion yearned to save, to help, to comfort him. Words seemed so powerless I offered none, only put my hand on his poor head, wounded, homeless, bowed down with grief for which I had no cure, and softly smoothed the long, neglected hair, pitifully wondering the while where was the wife who must have loved this tender-hearted man so well.

The captain moaned again, and faintly whispered, "Air!" but I never stirred. God forgive me! just then I hated him as only a woman thinking of a sister woman's wrongs could hate. Robert looked up; his eyes were dry again, his mouth grim. I saw that, said, "Tell me more," and he did; for sympathy is a gift the poorest may give, the proudest stoop to receive.

"Yer see, missis, his father—I might say ours, ef I warn't ashamed of both of 'em—his father died two years ago, an' left us all to Marster Ned—that's him here, eighteen then. He always

hated me, I looked so like old marster: he don't, only the light skin an' hair. Old marster was kind to all of us, me 'specially, and bought Lucy off the next plantation down there in South Car'lina when he found I liked her. I married her all I could; it warn't much, but we was true to one another till Marster Ned come home a year after an' made hell fer both of us. He sent my old mother to be used up in his rice-swamp in Georgy; he found me with my pretty Lucy, an' though young Miss cried, an' I prayed to him on my knees, an' Lucy run away, he wouldn't have no mercy; he brought her back, an'—took her."

"Oh, what did you do?" I cried, hot with helpless pain and passion.

How the man's outraged heart sent the blood flaming up into his face and deepened the tones of his impetuous voice, as he stretched his arm across the bed, saying, with a terribly expressive gesture:

"I half murdered him, an' to-night I'll finish."

"Yes, yes, but go on now; what came next?"

He gave me a look that showed no white man could have felt a deeper degradation in remembering and confessing these last acts of brotherly oppression.

"They whipped me till I couldn't stand, an'

then they sold me further South. Yer thought I was a white man once; look here!"

With a sudden wrench he tore the shirt from neck to waist, and on his strong, brown shoulders showed me furrows deeply ploughed, wounds which, though healed, were ghastlier to me than any in that house. I could not speak to him, and, with the pathetic dignity a great grief lends the humblest sufferer, he ended his brief tragedy by simply saying:

"That's all, missis. I'se never seen her since, an' now I never shall in this world, maybe not in t'other."

"But, Robert, why think her dead? The captain was wandering when he said those sad things; perhaps he will retract them when he is sane. Don't despair; don't give up yet."

"No, missis, I 'spect he's right: she was too proud to bear that long. It's like her to kill herself. I told her to, if there was no other way; an' she always minded me, Lucy did. My poor girl! Oh, it was not right! No, indeed, it was not!"

As the memory of this bitter wrong, this double bereavement, burned in his sore heart, the devil that lurks in every strong man's blood leaped up; he put his hand upon his brother's throat, and, watch-

ing the white face before him, muttered low between his teeth:

"I'm lettin' him go too easy; there's no pain in this; we ain't even yet. I wish he knew me. Marster Ned! it's Bob. Where's Lucy?"

From the captain's lips there came a long faint sigh, and nothing but a flutter of the eyelids showed that he still lived. A strange stillness filled the room as the elder brother held the younger's life suspended in his hand, while wavering between a dim hope and a deadly hate. In the whirl of thoughts that went on in my brain, only one was clear enough to act upon. I must prevent murder, if I could, but how? What could I do up there alone, locked in with a dying man and a lunatic? —for any mind yielded utterly to any unrighteous impulse is mad while the impulse rules it. Strength I had not, nor much courage, neither time nor wit for stratagem, and chance only could bring me help before it was too late. But one weapon I possessed, a tongue, often a woman's best defence; and sympathy, stronger than fear, gave me power to use it. What I said heaven only knows, but surely heaven helped me; words burned on my lips, tears streamed from my eyes, and some good angel prompted me to use the one name that had power to arrest my hearer's hand and touch

his heart. For at that moment I heartily believed that Lucy lived, and this earnest faith roused in him a like belief.

He listened with the lowering look of one in whom brute instinct was sovereign for the time—a look that makes the noblest countenance base. He was but a man—a poor, untaught, outcast, outraged man. Life had few joys for him; the world offered him no honours, no success, no home, no love. What future would this crime mar? and why should he deny himself that sweet yet bitter morsel called revenge? How many white men, with all New England's freedom, culture, Christianity, would not have felt as he felt then? Should I have reproached him for a human anguish, a human longing for redress, all now left him from the ruin of his few poor hopes? Who had taught him that self-control, self-sacrifice, are attributes that make men masters of the earth, and lift them nearer heaven? Should I have urged the beauty of forgiveness, the duty of devout submission? He had no religion, for he was no saintly "Uncle Tom," and Slavery's black shadow seemed to darken all the world to him, and shut out God. Should I have warned him of penalties, of judgments, and the potency of law? What did he know of justice, or the mercy that should temper

that stern virtue, when every law, human and divine, had been broken on his hearthstone? Should I have tried to touch him by appeals to filial duty, to brotherly love? How had his appeals been answered? What memories had father and brother stored up in his heart to plead for either now? No; all these influences, these associations, would have proved worse than useless, had I been calm enough to try them. I was not; but instinct, subtler than reason, showed me the one safe clue by which to lead this troubled soul from the labyrinth in which it groped and nearly fell. When I paused, breathless, Robert turned to me, asking, as if human assurances could strengthen his faith in Divine Omnipotence:

"Do you believe, if I let Marster Ned live, the Lord will give me back my Lucy?"

"As surely as there is a Lord, you will find her here or in the beautiful hereafter, where there is no black or white, no master and no slave."

He took his hand from his brother's throat, lifted his eyes from my face to the wintry sky beyond, as if searching for that blessed country, happier even than the happy North. Alas! it was the darkest hour before the dawn—there was no star above, no light below but the pale glimmer of the lamp that showed the brother who had made

him desolate. Like a blind man who believes there is a sun, yet cannot see it, he shook his head, let his arms drop nervelessly upon his knees, and sat there dumbly asking that question which many a soul whose faith is firmer fixed than his has asked in hours less dark than this, "Where is God?" I saw the tide had turned, and strenuously tried to keep this rudderless lifeboat from slipping back into the whirlpool wherein it had been so nearly lost.

"I have listened to you, Robert; now hear me, and heed what I say, because my heart is full of pity for you, full of hope for your future, and a desire to help you now. I want you to go away from here, from the temptation of this place, and the sad thoughts that haunt it. You have conquered yourself once, and I honour you for it, because, the harder the battle, the more glorious the victory; but it is safer to put a greater distance between you and this man. I will write you letters, give you money, and send you to good old Massachusetts to begin your new life a free man—yes, and a happy man; for when the captain is himself again I will learn where Lucy is, and move heaven and earth to find and give her back to you. Will you do this, Robert?"

Slowly, very slowly, the answer came; for the

purpose of a week, perhaps a year, was hard to relinquish in an hour.

"Yes, missis, I will."

"Good! Now you are the man I thought you, and I'll work for you with all my heart. You need sleep, my poor fellow, go, and try to forget. The captain is alive, and as yet you are spared that sin. No, don't look there; I'll care for him. Come, Robert, for Lucy's sake."

Thank heaven for the immortality of love! for when all other means of salvation failed, a spark of this vital fire softened the man's iron will, until a woman's hand could bend it. He let me take from him the key, let me draw him gently away, and lead him to the solitude which now was the most healing balm I could bestow. Once in his little room, he fell down on his bed and lay there, as if spent with the sharpest conflict of his life. I slipped the bolt across his door, and unlocked my own, flung up the window, steadied myself with a breath of air, then rushed to Doctor Franck. He came; and till dawn we worked together, saving one brother's life, and taking earnest thought how best to secure the other's liberty. When the sun came up as blithely as if it shone only upon happy homes, the Doctor went to Robert. For an hour I heard the murmur of

their voices; once I caught the sound of heavy sobs, and for a time a reverent hush, as if in the silence that good man were ministering to soul as well as body. When he departed he took Robert with him, pausing to tell me he should get him off as soon as possible, but not before we met again.

Nothing more was seen of them all day; another surgeon came to see the captain, and another attendant came to fill the empty place. I tried to rest, but could not, with the thought of poor Lucy tugging at my heart, and was soon back at my post again, anxiously hoping that my contraband had not been too hastily spirited away. Just as night fell there came a tap, and, opening, I saw Robert literally "clothed, and in his right mind." The Doctor had replaced the ragged suit with tidy garments, and no trace of that tempestuous night remained but deeper lines upon the forehead, and the docile look of a repentant child. He did not cross the threshold, did not offer me his hand—only took off his cap, saying, with a traitorous falter in his voice:

"God bless yer, missis! I'm gwine."

I put out both my hands, and held his fast.

"Good-bye, Robert! Keep up good heart, and

when I come home to Massachusetts we'll meet in a happier place than this. Are you quite ready, quite comfortable for your journey?"

"Yes, missis, yes; the Doctor's fixed everything; I'se gwine with a friend of his; my papers are all right, an' I'm as happy as I can be till I find"——

He stopped there; then went on, with a glance into the room:

"I'm glad I didn't do it, an' I thank yer, missis, fer hinderin' me: thank yer hearty; but I'm afraid I hate him jest the same."

Of course he did; and so did I; for these faulty hearts of ours cannot turn perfect in a night, but need frost and fire, wind and rain, to ripen and make them ready for the great harvest-home. Wishing to divert his mind, I put my poor mite into his hand, and, remembering the magic of a certain little book, I gave him mine, on whose dark cover whitely shone the Virgin Mother and the Child, the grand history of whose life the book contained. The money went into Robert's pocket with a grateful murmur, the book into his bosom, with a long look and a tremulous——

"I never saw *my* baby, missis."

I broke down then; and although my eyes were too dim to see, I felt the touch of lips upon

my hands, heard the sound of departing feet, and knew my contraband was gone.

When one feels an intense dislike, the less one says about the subject of it the better; therefore I shall merely record that the captain lived—in time was exchanged; and that, whoever the other party was, I am convinced the Government got the best of the bargain. But long before this occurred, I had fulfilled my promise to Robert; for as soon as my patient recovered strength of memory enough to make his answer trustworthy, I asked, without any circumlocution:

"Captain Fairfax, where is Lucy?"

And too feeble to be angry, surprised, or insincere, he straightway answered:

"Dead, Miss Dane."

"And she killed herself when you sold Bob?"

"However did you know that?" he muttered, with an expression half-remorseful, half-amazed; but I was satisfied, and said no more.

Of course this went to Robert, waiting far away there in a lonely home—waiting, working, hoping for his Lucy. It almost broke my heart to do it; but delay was weak, deceit was wicked; so I sent the heavy tidings, and very soon the answer came—only three lines; but I felt that the sustaining power of the man's life was gone.

"I tort I'd never see her any more; I'm glad to know she's out of trouble. I thank yer, missis; an' if they let us, I'll fight for yer till I'm killed, which I hope will be 'fore long."

Six months later he had his wish, and kept his word.

Every one knows the story of the attack on Fort Wagner; but we should not tire yet of recalling how our Fifty-Fourth, spent with three sleepless nights, a day's fast, and a march under the July sun, stormed the fort as night fell, facing death in many shapes, following their brave leaders through a fiery rain of shot and shell, fighting valiantly for "God and Governor Andrew;" how the regiment that went into action seven hundred strong, came out having had nearly half its number captured, killed, or wounded, leaving their young commander to be buried, like a chief of earlier times, with his body-guard around him, faithful to the death. Surely, the insult turns to honour, and the wide grave needs no monument but the heroism that consecrates it in our sight; surely, the hearts that held him nearest, see through their tears a noble victory in the seeming sad defeat; and surely, God's benediction was bestowed, when this loyal soul answered, as Death called the roll,

"Lord, here am I, with the brothers Thou hast given me!"

The future must show how well that fight was fought; for though Fort Wagner once defied us, public prejudice is down; and through the cannon-smoke of that black night, the manhood of the coloured race shines before many eyes that would not see, rings in many ears that would not hear, wins many hearts that would not hitherto believe.

When the news came that we were needed, there was none so glad as I to leave teaching contrabands, the new work I had taken up, and go to nurse "our boys," as my dusty flock so proudly called the wounded of the Fifty-Fourth. Feeling more satisfaction, as I assumed my big apron and turned up my cuffs, than if dressing for the President's levee, I fell to work in Hospital No. 10 at Beaufort. The scene was most familiar, and yet strange; for only dark faces looked up at me from the pallets so thickly laid along the floor, and I missed the sharp accent of my Yankee boys in the slower, softer voices calling cheerily to one another, or answering my questions with a stout, "We'll never give it up, missis, till the last Reb's dead," or, "If our people's free, we can afford to die."

Passing from bed to bed, intent on making one pair of hands do the work of three, at least, I

gradually washed, fed, and bandaged my way down the long line of sable heroes, and coming to the very last, found that he was my contraband. So old, so worn, so deathly weak and wan, I never should have known him but for the deep scar on his cheek. That side lay uppermost, and caught my eye at once; but even then I doubted, such an awful change had come upon him, when, turning to the ticket just above his head, I saw the name, "Robert Dane." That both assured and touched me, for, remembering that he had no name, I knew that he had taken mine. I longed for him to speak to me, to tell how he had fared since I lost sight of him, and let me perform some little service for him in return for many he had done for me; but he seemed asleep; and as I stood reliving that strange night again, a bright lad, who lay next him softly waving an old fan across both beds, looked up and said:

"I guess you know him, missis?"

"You are right. Do you?"

"As much as any one was able to, missis."

"Why do you say 'was,' as if the man were dead and gone?"

"I s'pose because I know he'll have to go. He's got a bad jab in the breast, and is bleedin' inside, the Doctor says. He don't suffer any, only

get weaker 'n' weaker every minute. I've been fannin' him this long while, an' he's talked a little; but he don't know me now, so he's most gone, I guess."

There was so much sorrow and affection in the boy's face, that I remembered something, and asked, with redoubled interest:

"Are you the one that brought him off? I was told about a boy who nearly lost his life in saving that of his mate."

I dare say the young fellow blushed, as any modest lad might have done; I could not see it, but I heard the chuckle of satisfaction that escaped him, as he glanced from his shattered arm and bandaged side to the pale figure opposite.

"Lord, missis, that's nothin'; we boys always stan' by one another, an' I warn't goin' to leave him to be tormented any more by them cussed Rebs. He's been a slave once, though he don't look half so much like it as me, an' I was born in Boston."

He did not; for the speaker was as black as the ace of spades—being a sturdy specimen, the knave of clubs would perhaps be a fitter representative—but the dark freeman looked at the white slave with the pitiful yet puzzled expression I have so often seen on the faces of our wisest

men, when this tangled question of Slavery presented itself, asking to be cut or patiently undone.

"Tell me what you know of this man; for, even if he were awake, he is too weak to talk."

"I never saw him till I joined the regiment, an' no one 'peared to have got much out of him. He was a shut-up sort of feller, and didn't seem to care for anything but gettin' at the Rebs. Some say he was the fust man of us that enlisted; I know he fretted till we were off, an' when we pitched into old Wagner, he fought like the devil!"

"Were you with him when he was wounded? How was it?"

"Yes, missis. There was somethin' queer about it; for he 'peared to know the chap that killed him, an' the chap knew him. I don't dare to ask, but I rather guess one owned the other some time; for when they clinched the chap sung out, 'Bob!' an' Dane, 'Marster Ned!'—then they went at it."

I sat down suddenly, for the old anger and compassion struggled in my heart, and I both longed and feared to hear what was to follow.

"You see, when the colonel—Lord keep an' send him back to us! it ain't certain yet, you

know, missis, though it's two days ago we lost him—well, when the colonel shouted, "Rush on, boys, rush on!' Dane tore away as if he was goin' to take the fort alone; I was next him, an' kept close as we went through the ditch an' up the wall. Hi! warn't that a rusher!" and the boy flung up his well arm with a whoop, as if the mere memory of that stirring moment came over him in a gust of irrepressible excitement.

"Were you afraid?" I said, asking the question women often put, and receiving the answer they seldom fail to get.

"No, missis!"—emphasis on the "missis." "I never thought of anything but the wicked Rebs, that scalp, slash, an' cut our ears off, when they git us. I was bound to let daylight into one of 'em at least, an' I did. Hope he liked it."

"It is evident that you did. Now go on about Robert, for I should be at work."

"He was one of the fust up, I was just behind; and though the whole thing happened in a minute, I remember how it was, for all I was yellin' and knockin' round like mad. Just where we were, some sort of an officer was wavin' his sword an' cheerin' on his men; Dane saw him by a big flash that come by; he flung away his gun, give a leap, an' went at that feller as if he was

Jeff, Beauregard, an' Lee, all in one. I scrabbled after as quick as I could, but was only up in time to see him git the sword straight through him an' drop into the ditch. You needn't ask what I did next, missis, for I don't quite know myself; all I'm clear about is, that I managed somehow to pitch that Reb into the fort as dead as Moses, git hold of Dane, an' bring him off. Poor old feller! we said we went in to live or die; he said he went in to die, an' he's done it."

I had been intently watching the excited speaker; but as he regretfully added those last words I turned again, and Robert's eyes met mine —those melancholy eyes, so full of an intelligence that proved he had heard, remembered, and reflected with that preternatural power which often outlives all other faculties. He knew me, yet gave no greeting; was glad to see a woman's face, yet had no smile wherewith to welcome it; felt that he was dying, yet uttered no farewell. He was too far across the river to return or linger now; departing thought, strength, breath, were spent in one grateful look, one murmur of submission to the last pang he could ever feel. His lips moved, and, bending to them, a whisper chilled my cheek, as it shaped the broken words: "I'd 'a' done it; but it's better so; I'm satisfied."

Ah! well he might be; for as he turned his face from the shadow of the life that was, the sunshine of the life to be touched it with a beautiful content, and in the drawing of a breath my contraband found wife and home, eternal liberty and God.

The King of Clubs and the Queen of Hearts.

FIVE-AND-TWENTY ladies, all in a row, sat on one side of the hall, looking very much as if they felt like the little old woman who fell asleep on the king's highway and awoke with abbreviated drapery, for they were all arrayed in grey tunics and Turkish continuations, profusely adorned with many-coloured trimmings. Five-and-twenty gentlemen, all in a row, sat on the opposite side of the hall, looking somewhat subdued, as men are apt to do when they fancy they are in danger of making fools of themselves. They also were *en* costume, for all the dark ones had grown piratical in red shirts, the light ones nautical in blue; and a few boldly appeared in white, making up in starch and studs what they lost in colour, while all were more or less Byronic as to collar.

On the platform appeared a pile of dumb-bells, a regiment of clubs, and a pyramid of bean-bags, and stirring nervously among them a foreign-looking gentleman, the new leader of a class lately formed by Dr. Thor Turner, whose mission it was to strengthen the world's spine, and convert it to a belief in air and exercise, by setting it to balancing its poles and spinning merrily, while enjoying the "Sun-cure" on a large scale. His advent formed an epoch in the history of the town; for it was a quiet old village, guiltless of bustle, fashion, or parade, where each man stood for what he was; and, being a sagacious set, every one's true value was pretty accurately known. It was a neighbourly town, with gossip enough to stir the social atmosphere with small gusts of interest or wonder, yet do no harm. A sensible, free-and-easy town, for the wisest man in it wore the worst boots, and no one thought the less of his understanding; the belle of the village went shopping with a big sun-bonnet and tin pail, and no one found her beauty lessened; oddities of all sorts ambled peacefully about on their various hobbies, and no one suggested the expediency of a trip on the wooden horse upon which the chivalrous South is always eager to mount an irrepressible abolitionist. Restless people were soothed

by the lullaby the river sang in its slow journey to the sea; old people here found a pleasant place to make ready to die in; young people to survey the world from, before taking their first flight; and strangers looked back upon it as a quiet nook full of ancient legends and modern lights, which would keep its memory green when many a gayer spot was quite forgotten. Anything based upon common sense found favour with the inhabitants, and Dr. Turner's theories, being eminently so, were accepted at once, and energetically carried out. A sort of heathen revival took place, for even the ministers and deacons turned Mussulmen; old ladies tossed bean-bags till their caps were awry, and winter-roses blossomed on their cheeks; school-children proved the worth of the old proverb, "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure," by getting their backs ready before the burden came; pale girls grew blithe and strong swinging their dumb namesakes; and jolly lads marched to and fro embracing clubs, as if longevity were corked up in those wooden bottles, and they all took "modest quenchers" by the way.

August Bopp, the new leader of the class, was a German possessing but a small stock of English, though a fine gymnast; and being also a

bashful man, the appointed moment had no sooner arrived than he found his carefully-prepared sentences slipping away from his memory as the ice appears to do from under unhappy souls first mounted upon skates. An awful silence reigned: Mr. Bopp glancing nervously over his shoulder at the staring rows, more appalling in their stillness than if they had risen up and hooted at him; then piling up the bags for the seventh time, he gave himself a mental shake, and, with a crimson visage, was about to launch his first "Ladees und gentlemen," when the door opened, and a small, merry-faced figure appeared, looking quite at ease in the novel dress, as, with a comprehensive nod, it marched straight across the hall to its place among the weaker vessels.

A general glance of approbation followed from the gentlemen's side, a welcoming murmur ran along the ladies', and the fifty pairs of eyes changed their focus for a moment. Taking advantage of which, Mr. Bopp righted himself, and burst out with a decided:

"Ladees und gentlemen: The time have arrived that we shall begin. Will the gentlemen serve the ladees to a wand, each one, then spread theirselves about the hall, and follow the motions I will make as I shall count."

Five minutes of chaos, then all fell into order, and nothing was heard but the leader's voice and the stir of many bodies moving simultaneously. An uninitiated observer would have thought himself in Bedlam; for, as the evening wore on, the laws of society seemed given to the winds, and humanity gone mad. Bags flew in all directions, clubs hurtled through the air, and dumb-bells played a castinet accompaniment to peals of laughter that made better music than any band. Old and young gave themselves up to the universal merriment, and, setting dignity aside, played like happy-hearted children for an hour. Stout Dr. Quackenboss gasped twice round the hall on one toe; stately Mrs. Primmins ran like a girl of fifteen to get her pins home before her competitor; Tommy Inches, four feet three, trotted away with Deacon Stone on his shoulder; while Mr. Steepleton and Miss Maypole hopped together like a pair of lively young ostriches, and Ned Amandine, the village beau, blew arrows through a pop-gun, like a modern Cupid in pegtops instead of pinions.

The sprightly young lady whose entrance had been so opportune seemed a universal favourite, and was overwhelmed with invitations to "bag," "hop," and "blow" from the gentlemen who hovered about her, cheerfully distorting themselves

to the verge of dislocation in order to win a glance of approbation from the merry black eyes which were the tapers where all these muscular moths singed their wings. Mr. Bopp had never seen such a little piece of earnestness before, and began to think that the young lady must be in training for a boat-race or the ring. Her dumb-bells flew about till a pair of white arms looked like the sails of a windmill; she hit out from the shoulder with a vigour that would have done execution had there been anything but empty air to "punish;" and the "one, two, three!" of the Zouave movement went off with a snap; while the colour deepened from pink to scarlet in her cheeks, the black braids tumbled down upon her shoulders, and the clasp of her belt flew asunder; but her eye seldom left the leader's face, and she followed every motion with an agility and precision quite inspiring. Mr. Bopp's courage rose as he watched her, and a burning desire to excel took possession of him, till he felt as if his muscles were made of india-rubber, and his nerves of iron. He went into his work heart and soul, shaking a brown mane out of his eyes, issuing commands like a general at the head of his troops, and keeping both interest and fun in full blast till people laughed who had not laughed heartily for years; lungs got their fill for

once, unsuspected muscles were suddenly developed, and when the clock struck ten, all were bubbling over with that innocent jollity which makes youth worth possessing, and its memory the sunshine of old age.

The last exercise was drawing to a close, and a large ring of respectable members of society were violently sitting down and rising up in a manner which would have scandalized Miss Wilhelmina Carolina Amelia Skeggs to the last degree, when Mr. Bopp was seen to grow very pale, and drop in a manner which it was evident his pupils were not expected to follow.

At this unexpected performance, the gentlemen took advantage of their newly-acquired agility to fly over all obstacles and swarm on to the platform, while the ladies successfully lessened their unusual bloom by staring wildly at one another and suggesting awful impossibilities. The bustle subsided as suddenly as it arose; and Mr. Bopp, rather damp about the head and dizzy about the eye, but quite composed, saying, with the broken English and appealing manner which caused all the ladies to pronounce him "a dear" on the spot:

"I hope you will excoose me for making this lesson to be more short than it should; but I have

exercise nine hours this day, and being just got well from a illness, I have not recover the strength I have lost. Next week I shall be able to take time by the hair, so that I will not have so much engagements in one day. I thank you for your kindness, and say good-efening."

After a round of applause, as a last vent for their spirits, the class dispersed, and Mr. Bopp was wrestling with a vicious pin as he put on his collar ("A sure sign he has no ma to see to his buttons, poor lamb!" thought Mrs. Fairbairn, watching him from afar); when the sprightly young lady, accompanied by a lad the masculine image of herself, appeared upon the platform, saying, with an aspect as cordial as her words:

"Good-evening, sir. Allow me to introduce my brother and myself, Dick and Dolly Ward, and ask you, in my mother's name, to come home with us; for the tavern is not a cosy place, and after all this exertion you should be made comfortable. Please come, for Dr. Turner always stayed with us, and we promised to do the honours of the town to any gentleman he might send to supply his place."

"Of course we did; and mother is probably freezing her blessed nose off watching for us; so don't disappoint her, Bopp. It's all settled

the sleigh's at the door, and here's your coat; so, come on!"

Dick was a fine sample of young America in its best aspect, and would have said "How are you?" to Louis Napoleon if he had been at hand, and would have done it so heartily that the great Frenchman would have found it hard to resist giving as frank an answer. Therefore, no wonder that Mr. Bopp surrendered at once; for the young gentleman took possession of him bodily, and shook him into his coat with an amiable impetuosity which developed a sudden rent in the well-worn sleeve thereof, and caused an expression of dismay to dawn upon the owner's countenance.

"Beg pardon; never mind; mother'll sew you up in two seconds, and your overcoat will hide the damage. Where is it? I'll get it, and then we'll be off."

Mr. Bopp coloured distressfully, looked up, looked down, and then straight into the lad's face, saying simply:

"Thank you; I haf no coat but one."

Dick opened his eyes, and was about opening his mouth also, for the exit of some blunderingly good-natured reply, when a warning poke from his sister restrained him; while Dolly, with the innocent hypocrisy which is as natural to some women

as the art of tying bows, said, as she led the way out:

"You see the worth of gymnastics, Dick, in this delightful indifference to cold. I sincerely hope we may reach a like enviable state of health, and look upon great-coats as effeminate, and mufflers a weakness of the flesh. Do you think we shall, Mr. Bopp?"

He shook his head with a perceptible shiver as the keen north wind smote him in the face, but answered with a look half merry, half sad:

"It is not choice, but what you call necessitee, with me; and I truly hope you may never haf to exercise to keep life in you when you haf sold your coat to pay your doctor's bill, or teach the art of laughing while your heart is heavy as one stone. You would not like that, I think, yet it is good, too; for small things make much happiness for me, and a kind word is often better than a rix-dollar."

There was something in the young man's tone and manner which touched and won his hearers at once. Dolly secretly resolved to put an extra blanket on his bed, and shower kind words upon him, while Dick tucked him up in buffalo robes, where he sat helplessly beaming down upon the red hood at his side.

A roaring fire shone out hospitably as they came, and glorified the pleasant room, dancing on ancient furniture and pictured walls till the jolly old portraits seemed to wink a visible welcome. A cheery-faced little woman, like an elder Dolly, in a widow's cap, stood on the threshold, with a friendly greeting for the stranger, which warmed him as no fire could have done.

If August Bopp had been an Englishman, he would have felt much, but said less on that account; if he had been an American, he would have tried to conceal his poverty, and impress the family with his past grandeur, present importance, or future prospects; being a German, he showed exactly what he was, with the childlike frankness of his race. Having had no dinner, he ate heartily of what was offered him; being cold, he basked in the generous warmth; being homesick and solitary, he enjoyed the genial influences that surrounded him, and told his story, sure of sympathy; for even in prosaic Yankeedom he had found it, as travellers find Alpine flowers among the snow.

It was a simple story of a laborious boyhood, being early left an orphan, with a little sister dependent on him, till an opening in America tempted him to leave her, and come to try and earn

a home for her and for himself. Sickness, misfortune, and disappointment had been his companions for a year; but he still worked, still hoped, and waited for the happy hour when little Ulla should come to him across the sea. This was all; yet as he told it, with the magical accompaniments of gesture, look, and tone, it seemed full of pathos and romance to his listeners, whose faces proved their interest more flatteringly than their words.

Mrs. Ward mended the torn coat with motherly zeal, and gave it many of those timely stitches which thrifty women love to sew. The young folks devoted themselves to their guest, each in a characteristic manner. Dick, as host, offered every article of refreshment the house afforded, goaded the fire to a perpetual roar, and discussed gymnastics, with bursts of boyish admiration for the grace and skill of his new leader, whom he christened King of Clubs on the spot. Dolly made the stranger one of them at once by talking bad German, as an offset to his bad English, and unconsciously symbolized his future bondage by giving him a tangled skein to hold for the furtherance of her mother's somewhat lengthened job.

The Cupid of the present day was undoubtedly "raised" in Connecticut; for the ingenuity and shrewdness of that small personage could have

sprung from no other soil. In former times his stratagems were of the romantic order. Collin bleated forth his passion in rhyme, and cast sheep's eyes among his flock, while Phyllis coquetted with her crook and stuck posies in his hat; royal Ferdinand and Miranda played at chess; Ivanhoe upset his fellow-men like nine-pins for love of lackadaisical Rowena; and "sweet Moll" turned the pages while her lover, Milton, sang. But in our day, the jolly little god, though still a heathen in the severe simplicity of his attire, has become modernized in his arts, and invented huskins, apple-bees, sleigh-rides, "dropins," gymnastics, and, among his finer snares, the putting on of skates, drawing of patterns, and holding skeins—the last-named having superior advantages over the others, as all will testify who have enjoyed one of those hand-to-hand skirmishes.

August Bopp was three-and-twenty, imaginative, grateful, and heart-whole; therefore, when he found himself sitting opposite a blooming little damsel, with a head bound by a pretty red snood bent down before him, and very close to his own a pair of distracting hands, every finger of which had a hit to make, and made it, it is not to be denied that he felt himself entering upon a new and very agreeable experience. Where could he

look but in the face opposite, sometimes so girlishly merry and sometimes so beautifully shy? It was a winning face, full of smooth curves, fresh colours, and sunshiny twinkles—a face every one liked, for it was as changeful as an April day, and always pleasant, whether mischievous, mournful, or demure.

Like one watching a new picture, Mr. Bopp inspected every feature of the countenance so near his own; and as his admiration "grew by what it fed on," he fell into a chronic state of stammer and blush; for the frank eyes were very kind, the smooth cheeks reflected a pretty shade of his own crimson, and the smiling lips seemed constantly suggesting, with mute eloquence, that they were made for kissing, while the expressive hands picked at the knots till August felt like a very resigned fly in the web of a most enticing young spider.

If the King of Clubs saw a comely face, the Queen of Hearts saw what observing girls call a "good face;" and with a womanly respect for strength, the manliest attribute of man, she admired the broad shoulders and six feet one of her new master. This face was not handsome, for, true to his fatherland, Bopp had an eminent nose, a blonde beard, and a crop of "bonny brown

hair" long enough to have been gathered into a ribbon, as in the days of Schiller and Jean Paul; but Dolly liked it, for its strength was tempered with gentleness; patience and courage gave it dignity, and the glance that met her own was both keen and kind.

The silk was wound at last—the coat repaired. Dick with difficulty concealed the growing stiffness of his shoulders, while Dolly turned up the lamp, which bluntly hinted bedtime, and Mrs. Ward successfully devoured six gapes behind her hand, but was detected in the seventh by Mr. Bopp, who glanced at the clock, stopped in the middle of a sentence, and, with a hurried "goot-night," made for the door without the least idea whither he was going. Piloted by Dick he was installed in the "best chamber," where his waking dreams were enlivened by a great fire, and his sleeping ones by an endless succession of skeins, each rapturously concluded in the style of Sam Weller when folding carpets with the pretty maid.

"I tell you, Dolly, it won't do, and I'm not going to have it."

"Oh, indeed; and how will you help it, you absurd boy?"

"Why, if you don't stop it, I'll just say to

Bopp—'Look here, my dear fellow; this sister of mine is a capital girl, but she will flirt, and'—"

"Add it's a family failing, Dick," cut in Dolly.

"Not a bit of it. I shall say, 'Take care ot your heart, Bopp, for she has a bad habit of playing battledore and shuttlecock with these articles; and, though it may be very good fun for a time, it makes them ache when they get a last knock and are left to lie in a corner.'"

"What eloquence! But you'd never dare to try it on Mr. Bopp; and I shouldn't like to predict what would happen to you if you did."

"If you say 'dare,' I'll do it the first minute I see him. As for consequences, I don't care that for 'em;" and Dick snapped his fingers with an aspect of much disdain. But something in his sister's face suggested the wisdom of moderation, and moved him to say, less like a lord of creation, and more like a brother who privately adored his sister, but of course was not going to acknowledge such a weakness:

"Well, but soberly, now, I wish you wouldn't plague Bopp; for it's evident to me that he is hit; and from the way that you've gone on these two months, what else was to be expected? Now, as the head of the family—you needn't laugh, for I am—I think I ought to interfere; and so I put it

to you—do you like him, and will you have him? or are you merely amusing yourself, as you have done ever since you were out of pinafores! If you like him, all serene. I'd rather have him for a brother than any one I know, for he's a regular trump, though he *is* poor; but if you don't I won't have the dear old fellow floored just because you like to see it done."

It may here be remarked that Dolly quite glowed to hear her brother praise Mr. Bopp, and then she endorsed every word with mental additions of double warmth; but Dick had begun all wrong, and, manlike, demanded her confidence before she had made up her mind to own she had any to bestow; therefore nothing came of it but vexation of spirit; for it is a well-known fact that, on some subjects, if boys *will* tease, girls *will* fib, and both maintain that it is right. So Dolly whetted her feminine weapon, and assumed a lofty superiority.

"Dear me! what a sudden spasm of virtue! and why, if it is such a sin, has not the 'head of the house' taken his sister to task before, instead of indulging in a like degeneracy, and causing several interesting persons to tear their hair, and bewail his forgetfulness, when they ought to have blessed their stars he was out of the way?"

Dick snow-balled a dozing crow, and looked nettled; for he had attained that age when "Tom Brown at Oxford" was the book of books, the twelfth chapter being the favourite, and five young ladies having already been endowed with the significant heliotrope flower—all of which facts Dolly had skilfully brought to mind, as a return-shot for his somewhat personal remarks.

"Bah! they were only girls, and it don't amount to anything among us young folks; but Bopp is a grown man, and you ought to respect him too much to play such pranks with him. Besides, he's a German, and more tender-hearted than we rough Yankees, as any one can see by the way he acts when you snub him. He is proud, too, for all his meekness, and waits till he's sure you like him before he says anything; and he'll need the patience of a family of Jobs at the rate you're going on—a honey-pot one day, and a pickle-jar the next. Do make up your mind, and say yes or no right off, Dolly."

"Would you have me meet him at the door with a meek courtesy, and say, 'Oh, if you please, I'm ready to say, Yes, thank you, if you'll be good enough to say, Will you'?"

"Don't be a goose, child; you know I mean nothing of the kind; only you girls never will do

anything straight ahead, if you can dodge, and fuss, and make a mess of it. Just tell me one thing: Do you or don't you like old Bopp?"

"What an elegant way to put it? Of course I like him well enough as a leader; he is clever, and sort of cunning, and I enjoy his funny ways; but what in the world should I do with a great yellow-haired laddie who could put me in his pocket, and yet is so meek that I should never find the heart to henpeck him? You are welcome to him; and since you love him so much, there's no need of my troubling myself on his account; for, with you for a friend, he can have no earthly wish ungratified."

"Don't try to be cutting, Dolly, because you look homely when you do, and it's a woman's business to be pretty always. All I've got to say is, you will be in a nice state of mind if you damage Bopp; for every one likes him, and will be down upon you for a heartless little wretch; and I shan't blame them, I promise you."

"I wish the town wouldn't put its fingers in other people's pies, and you may tell it so, with my compliments; and all *I* have to say is, that you men have more liberty than you know what to do with, and we women haven't enough; so it's perfectly fair that we should show you the worth

of the thing by taking it away now and then. I shall do exactly as I please: dance, walk, ride, and flirt, whenever and with whomever I see fit; and the whole town, with Mr. Dick Ward at their head, can't stop me if I choose to go on. Now, then, what next?" After which declaration of independence Dolly folded her arms, and wheeled about and faced her brother, a spirited statuette of Self-Will, in a red hood and mittens.

Dick sternly asked—

"Is that your firm decision, ma'am?"

"Yes."

"And you will not give up your nonsense?"

"No."

"You are quite sure you don't care for Bopp?"

"I could slap him with all my heart."

"Very good. I shall see that you don't get a chance."

"I wouldn't try a skirmish, for you'll get beaten, Dick."

"We'll prove that, ma'am."

"We will, sir."

And the belligerents loftily paced up the lawn, with their purpose so well expressed by outward signs, that Mrs. Ward knew, by the cock of Dick's hat, and the decided tap of Dolly's heels, that a storm was brewing, before they entered the door.

This fraternal conversation took place some two months from the evening of Mr. Bopp's advent, as the young folks were strolling home from school, which school must be briefly alluded to, in order to explain the foregoing remarks. It was an excellent institution in all respects; for its presiding genius stood high in the townfolks' esteem, and might have served as an example to Dr. Watts' "busy bee," in the zeal with which he improved his "shining hours," and laid up honey against the winter, which many hoped would be long in coming. All manner of aids were provided for sprouting souls and bodies, diversions innumerable, and the best society. But, sad to relate, in spite of all these blessings, the students who resorted to this academy possessed an Adam-and-Eve-like proclivity for exactly what he hadn't got and didn't need; and, not contented with the pleasures provided, must needs play truant with that young scamp Eros, and turn the ancient town topsy-turvy with modern innovations, till scandalized spinsters predicted that the very babies would catch the fever, refuse their panada in jealous gloom, send billets-doux in their rattles, elope in wicker-carriages, and set up housekeeping in dolls' houses, after the latest fashion.

Certain inflammable Southerners introduced

the new game, and left such romantic legends of their loves behind them, that their successors were fired with an ambition to do the like, and excel in all things, from cricket to captivation.

This state of things is not to be wondered at; for America, being renowned as a "fast" nation, has become a sort of hot-bed, and seems to force humanity into early bloom. Therefore, past generations must not groan over the sprightly present, but sit in the chimney-corner and see the boys and girls play the game which is too apt to end in a checkmate for one of the players. To many of the lookers-on the new order of things was as good as a puppet-show; for, with the enthusiasm of youth, the actors performed their parts heartily, forgetting the audience in their own earnestness. Bless us! what revolutions went on under the round jackets, and what love-tokens lay in the pockets thereof. What plots and counterplots occupied the heads that wore the innocent-looking snoods, and what captives were taken in the many-coloured nets that would come off and have to be taken care of. What romances blossomed like dandelions along the road to school, and what tales the river might have told, if any one could have learned its musical speech. How certain gates were glorified by daily lingerings thereat,

and what tender memories hung about dingy desks, old pens, and books illustrated with all manner of symbolical designs.

Let those laugh who will: older and wiser men and women might have taken lessons of these budding heroes and heroines; for here all was honest, sincere, and fresh; the old world had not taught them falsehood, self-interest, or mean ambitions. When they lost or won, they frankly grieved or rejoiced, and wore no masks except in play, and then got them off as soon as possible. If blue-eyed Lizzie frowned, or went home with Joe, Ned, with a wisdom older lovers would do well to imitate, went in for another game at football, gave the rejected apple to little Sally, and whistled "Glory Hallelujah" instead of "Annie Laurie," which was better than blowing a rival's brains out, or glowering at womankind for ever after. Or, when Tom put on Clara's skates three successive days, and danced with her three successive evenings, leaving Kitty to freeze her feet in the one instance and fold her hands in the other, she just had a "good cry," gave her mother an extra kiss, and waited till the recreant Tom returned to his allegiance, finding his little friend a sweetheart in nature and in name.

Dick and Dolly were foremost in the ranks,

and expert in all the new amusements. Dick worshipped at many shrines, but most faithfully at that of a meek divinity, who returned charming answers to the ardent epistles which he left in her father's garden wall, where, Pyramus and Thisbe-like, they often chatted through a chink; and Dolly was seldom seen without a staff of aids who would have "fought, bled, and died" for her as cheerfully as the Little Corporal's Old Guard, though she paid them only in words; for her Waterloo had not yet come.

With the charming perversity of her sex in such matters, no sooner had Dolly declared that she didn't like Mr. Bopp, than she began to discover that she did; and so far from desiring "to slap him," a tendency to regard him with peculiar good-will and tenderness developed itself, much to her own surprise; for with all her coquetry and seeming coldness, Dolly had a right womanly heart of her own, though she had never acknowledged the fact till August Bopp looked at her with so much love and longing in his honest eyes. Then she found a little fear mingling with her regard, felt a strong desire to be respected by him,

discovered a certain something which she called conscience, restraining a reckless use of her power, and, soon after her lofty denial to Dick, was forced to own that Mr. Bopp had become her master in the finer species of gymnastics that came in with Adam and Eve, and have kept all creation turning somersets ever since. Of course these discoveries were unconfessed, even to that best bosom friend which any of us can have; yet her mother suspected them, and, with much anxiety, saw all, yet held her peace, knowing that her little daughter would, sooner or later, give her a fuller confidence than could be demanded; and remembering the happiest moments of her own happy past, when an older Dick wooed another Dolly, she left that flower, which never can be forced, to open at its own sweet will.

Meanwhile, Mr. Bopp, though carrying his heart upon his sleeve, believed his secret buried in the deepest gloom, and enjoyed all the delightful miseries lovers insist upon making for themselves. When Dolly was quiet or absent, he became pensive, the lesson dragged, and people fancied they were getting tired of the humbug; when Dolly was blithe and bland, he grew radiant, exercised within an inch of his life as a vent for his emotions, and people went home declaring gymnastics to be the

crowning triumph of the age; and when Dolly was capricious, Mr. Bopp became a bewildered weathercock, changing as the wind changed, and dire was the confusion occasioned thereby.

Like the sage fowl in the story, Dick said nothing, but "kept up a terrible thinking," and, not having had experience enough to know that when a woman says No she is very apt to mean Yes, he took Dolly at her word. Believing it to be his duty to warn "Old Bopp," he resolved to do it like a Roman brother, regardless of his own feelings or his sister's wrath, quite unconscious that the motive-power in the affair was a boyish love of ruling the young person who ruled every one else.

Matters stood thus, when the town was electrified by a general invitation to the annual jubilee at Jollyboys Hall, which this spring flowered into a masquerade, and filled the souls of old and young with visions of splendour, frolic and fun. Being an amiable old town, it gave itself up, like a kind grandma, to the wishes of its children, let them put its knitting away, disturb its naps, keep its hands busy with vanities of the flesh, and its mind in a state of chaos for three mortal weeks. Young ladies were obscured by tarlatan fogs, behind which they concocted angels' wings, newspaper gowns,

Minnehaha's wampum, and Cinderella's slippers. Inspired but incapable boys undertook designs that would have daunted a costumer of the first water, fell into sloughs of despond, and, emerging, settled down from peers and paladins into jovial tars, friar waterproofs, and officers in miscellaneous uniforms. Fathers laughed or grumbled at the whole thing, and advanced pecuniary loans with good or ill grace, as the case might be; but the mothers, whose interest in their children's pleasure is a sort of evergreen that no snows of time can kill, sewed spangles by the bushel, made wildernesses of tissue-paper blossom as the rose, kept tempers sweet, stomachs full, and domestic machinery working smoothly through it all, by that maternal magic which makes them the human providences of this naughty world.

"What shall I go as?" was the universal cry. Garrets were taken by storm, cherished relics were teased out of old ladies' lavendered chests (happy she who saw them again!), hats were made into boots, gowns into doublets, cloaks into hose, Sunday bonnets despoiled of their plumage, silken cauliflowers sown broadcast over the land, and cocked-up caps erected in every style of architecture, while, "Tag, Rag, and Bobtail!" drove a smashing business, and everybody

knew what everybody else was going to be, and solemnly vowed they didn't,—which transparent falsehood was the best joke of the whole.

Dolly allowed her mates to believe she was to be the Queen of Hearts, but privately laid hold of certain brocades worn by a trim grandmother half a century ago, and one evening burst upon her brother in a charming "Little Bo-Peep" costume, which, for the benefit of future distressed damsels, may be described as a white silk skirt, scarlet overdress. "neatly bundled up behind," as ancient ladies expressed it, blue hose with red clocks, high-heeled shoes with silver buckles, a nosegay in the tucker, and a fly-away hat perched on the top of black curls, which gave additional archness to Dolly's face as she entered, singing that famous ditty.

Dick surveyed her with approval, turning her about like a lay figure, and expressing his fraternal opinion that she was "the sauciest little turnout he ever saw," and then wet-blanketed the remark by adding, "Of course you don't call it a disguise, do you? and don't flatter yourself that you won't be known; for Dolly Ward is as plainly written in every curl, bow, and gimcrack, as if you wore a label on your back."

"Then I shan't wear it;" and off went the

hat at one fell blow, as Dolly threw her crook in one corner, her posy in another, and sat down an image of despair.

"Now, don't be a goose, and rip everything to bits; just wear a domino over all, as Fan is going to, and then, when you've had fun enough, take it off and do the pretty. It will make two rigs, you see, and bother the boys to your heart's content."

"Dick, I insist upon kissing you for that brilliant suggestion; and then you may run and get me eight yards of cambric, just the colour of Fan's; but if you tell any one, I'll keep her from dancing with you the whole evening;" with which bribe and threat Dolly embraced her brother, and shut the door in his face, while he, putting himself in good humour by imagining she was somebody else, departed on his muddy mission.

If the ghosts of the first settlers had taken their walks abroad on the eventful Friday night, they would have held up their shadowy hands at the scenes going on under their venerable noses; for strange figures flitted through the quiet streets, and, instead of decorous slumber, there was decidedly—

"A sound of revelry by night."

Spurs clanked and swords rattled over the

frosty ground, as if the British were about to make another flying call; hooded monks and nuns paced along, on carnal thoughts intent; ancient ladies and bewigged gentlemen seemed hurrying to enjoy a social cup of tea, and groan over the tax; barrels staggered and stuck through narrow ways, as if temperance were still among the lost arts; while bears, apes, imps, and elves pattered or sparkled by, as if a second Walpurgis Night had come, and all were bound for Blocksberg.

"Hooray for the rooster!" shouted Young Ireland, encamped on the sidewalk to see the show, as Mephistopheles' red cock's feather skimmed up the stairs, and he left a pink domino at the ladies' dressing-room door, with the brief warning, "Now cut your own capers, and leave me to mine," adding, as he paused a moment at the great door:

"By Jove! isn't it a jolly sight, though?"

And so it was; for a mammoth boot stood sentinel at the entrance; a Bedouin Arab leaned on his spear in one corner, looking as if ready to say—

"Fly to the desert, fly with me,"

to the pretty Jewess on his arm; a stately Hamlet, with irreproachable legs, settled his plumage in

nother, still undecided to which Ophelia he would irst address—

" The honey of his music vows."

Bluff King Hal's representative was waltzing in a vay that would have filled that stout potentate vith respectful admiration, while Queen Katherine lirted with a Fire Zouave. Alcibiades whisked Mother Goose about the room till the old lady's conical hat tottered on her head, and the Union ield fast to a very little Mac. Flocks of friars, black, white, and grey, pervaded the hall, with locks of ballet-girls, intended to represent peasants, but failing for lack of drapery; morning nd evening stars rose or set, as partners willed; ively red demons harassed meek nuns, and Knights f the Leopard, the Lion, or Griffin, flashed by, ooking heroically uncomfortable in their gilded ages; court ladies promenaded with Jack-tars, nd dukes danced with dairy-maids; while Brother onathan whittled, Aunt Dinah jabbered, Ingomar lourished his club, and every one felt warmly nthusiastic and vigorously jolly.

" Ach himmel! Das ist wunder schön!" murmured a tall, grey monk, looking in, and quite unconscious that he spoke aloud.

" Hullo, Bopp! I thought you weren't coming," cried Mephistopheles, in an emphatic whisper.

"Ah, I guess you! yes, you are well done. I should like to be a Faust for you, but I haf no time, no purse for a dress, so I throw this on, and run up for a hour or two. Where is—who is all these people? Do you know them?"

"The one with the Pope, Fra Diavolo, the telegraph, and two knights asking her to dance, is Dolly, if that's what you want to know. Go in and keep it up, Bopp, while you can; I am off for Fan; and Mephistopheles departed over the banisters with a weird agility that delighted the beholders; while the grey friar stole into a corner and watched the pink domino for half an hour, at the end of which time his regards were somewhat confused by discovering that there were two pink damsels so like that he could not tell which was the one pointed out by Dick, and which the newcomer.

"She thinks I will not know her, but I shall go now and find out for myself;" and, starting into sudden activity, the grey brother strode up to the nearest pink lady, bowed, and offered his arm. With a haughty little gesture of denial to several others, she accepted it, and they joined the circle of many-coloured promenaders that eddied round the hall. As they went, Mr. Bopp scrutinized his companion, but saw only a slender figure shrouded

rom head to foot, and the tip of a white glove esting on his arm.

"I will speak; then her voice will betray ier," he thought, forgetting that his own was ndisguisable.

"Madame, permit me that I fan you, it is so reatly warm."

A fan was surrendered with a bow, and the nasked face turned fully towards his own, while he hood trembled as if its wearer laughed si-ently.

"Ah, it is you; I know the eyes, the step, the augh. Miss Dolly, did you think you could hide rom me?"

"I did not wish to," was the whispered nswer.

"Did you think I would come?"

"I hoped so."

"Then you are not displease with me?"

"No; I am very glad; I wanted you."

The pink head drooped a little nearer, and nother white glove went to meet its mate upon is arm with a pretty, confiding gesture. Mr. Sopp instantly fell into a state of bliss. The ghts, music, gay surroundings, and, more than ll, this unwonted demonstration, put the crown-ng glory to the moment; and, fired with the

hopeful omen, he allowed his love to silence his prudence, and lead him to do, then and there, the very thing he had often resolved never to do at all.

"Ah, Miss Dolly, if you knew how much, how very much you haf enlarged my happiness, and made this efening shine for me, you would more often be a little friendly, for this winter has been all summer to me, since I knew you and your kind home, and now I haf no sorrow but that after the next lesson I come no more unless you gif me leaf. See now I must say this even here, when so much people are about us, because I cannot stop it; and you will forgif me that I cannot wait any longer."

"Mr. Bopp, please don't, please stop!" began the pink domino, in a hurried whisper.

But Mr. Bopp was not to be stopped. He had dammed up the stream so long, that now it rushed on fast, full and uncontrollable; for, leading her into one of the curtained recesses near by, he sat down beside her, and, still plying the fan, went on impetuously:

"I feel to say that I lofe you, and tho' I try to kill it, my lofe will not die, because it is more strong than my will, more dear than my pride, for I haf much, and I do not ask you to be meine Frau

till I can gif you more than my heart and my poor name. But hear now: I will work, and save, and wait a many years if at the end you will take all I haf and say, 'August, I lofe you.' Do not laugh at me because I say this in such poor words; you are my heart's dearest, and I must tell it, or never come again. Speak to me one kind yes, and I will thank Gott for so much joy."

The pink domino had listened to this rapid speech with averted head, and, when it ended, started up, saying eagerly, "You are mistaken, sir, I am not Dolly;" but as she spoke her words were belied, for the hasty movement partially displaced her mask, and Mr. Bopp saw Dolly's dark eyes, a lock of dark hair, and a pair of burning cheeks, before the screen was readjusted. With redoubled earnestness he held her back, whispering:

"Do not go mitout the little word, Yes, or No; it is not much to say."

"Well, then, No!"

"You mean it, Dolly—truly mean it?"

"Yes, let me go at once, sir."

Mr. Bopp stood up, saying slowly, "Yes, go now; they told me you had no heart; I beliefe it, and thank you for that No;" then bowed, and walked straight out of the hall, while the pink

domino broke into a fit of laughter, saying to herself:

"I've done it—I've done it! but what a piece of work there'll be to-morrow."

"Dick, who was that tall creature Fan was parading with last night? No one knew, and he vanished before the masks were taken off," asked Dolly, as she and her brother lounged in opposite corners of the sofa the morning after the masquerade, "talking it over."

"That was old Bopp, Mrs. Peep."

"Gracious me! Why, he said he wasn't coming."

"People sometimes say what they don't mean, as you may have discovered."

"But why didn't he come and speak to a body, Dick?"

"Better employed, I suppose."

"Now, don't be cross, dear, but tell me all about it, for I don't understand how you allowed him to monopolize Fan so."

"Oh, don't bother, I'm sleepy."

"No, you're not! you look wicked; I know

you've been in mischief, and I insist upon hearing all about it, so come and tell this instant."

Dolly proceeded to enforce her command by pulling away his pillow and dragging her brother into a sitting posture, in spite of his laughing resistance and evident desire to exhaust her patience, —for Dick excelled in teasing, and kept his sister in a fidget from morning till night, with occasional fits of penitence and petting which lasted till next time. Therefore, though dying to tell, he was undecided as to the best method of executing that task in the manner most aggravating to his listener and most agreeable to himself, and sat regarding her with twinkling eyes, and his curly pate in a high state of rumple, trying to appear innocently meek, but failing signally.

"Now, then, begin," commanded Dolly.

"Well, if you don't take my head off till I'm done, I'll tell you the best joke of the season. Are you sure the pink domino with Bopp wasn't yourself, for she looked and acted very like you?"

"Of course I am. I didn't even know he was there, and think it very rude and ungentlemanly in him not to come and speak to me. You know it was Fan, so do go on."

"But it wasn't, for she changed her mind and

wore a black domino; I saw her put it on myself. Her Cousin Jack came unexpectedly, and she thought if she altered her dress and went with him, you wouldn't know her."

"Who could it have been, Dick?"

"That's the mystery, for, do you know, Bopp proposed to her."

"He didn't!" and Dolly flew up with a startled look that, to adopt a phrase from his own vocabulary, was "nuts" to her brother.

"Yes, he did; I heard him."

"When, where, and how?"

"In one of those flirtation boxes; they dropped the curtain, but I heard him do it—on my honour, I did."

"Persons of honour don't listen at curtains and keyholes. What did they say?"

"Oh, if it wasn't honourable to listen, it isn't to hear; so I won't tell, though I could not help knowing it."

"Mercy! don't stop now, or I shall die with curiosity. I dare say I should have done the same; no one minds at such a place, you know. But I don't see the joke yet," said Dolly, dismally.

"I do," and Dick went off into a shout.

"You idiotic boy, take that pillow out of your mouth, and tell me the whole thing—what he said,

what she said, and what they both did. It was all fun, of course, but I'd like to hear about it."

"It may have been fun on her part, but it was solemn earnest on his, for he went it strong, I assure you. I'd no idea the old fellow was so sly, for he appeared so desperately in love with you, you know, and there he was finishing up with this unknown lady. I wish you could have seen him go on, with tears in his eyes——"

"How do you know, if you didn't see him?"

"Oh, well, that's only a figure of speech; I thought so from his voice. He was ever so tender, and took to Dutch when English was too cool for him. It was really touching, for I never heard a fellow do it before; and, upon my word, I should think it was rather a tough job to say that sort of thing to a pretty woman, mask or no mask."

"What did she say?" asked Dolly, with her hands pressed tight together, and a curious little quiver of the lips.

"She said No, as short as pie-crust; and when he rushed out, with his heart broken all to bits, apparently, she just burst out laughing, and went and polked at a two-forty pace for half an hour."

Dora unclasped her hands, took a long breath, and cried out:

"She was a wicked, heartless hussy, and if I know her, I'll never speak to her again; for if he was really in earnest, she ought to be killed for laughing at him."

"So ought you, then, for making fun of poor Fisher, when he went down on his knees behind the berry bushes last summer. He was earnest enough, for he looked as blue as his berries when he got home. Your theory is all right, ma'am, but your practice is all bosh."

"Hold your tongue about that silly thing. Boys in college think they know everything, can do everything, have everything, and only need beckon, and all womankind will come and adore. It made a man of him, and he'll thank me for taking the sentimental nonsense and conceit out of him. You will need just such a lesson at the rate you go on, and I hope Fan will give it to you."

"When the lecture is over I'll go on with the joke, if you want to know it."

"Isn't this all?"

"Oh, bless you, no! the cream of it is to come. What would you give to know who the lady was?"

"Five dollars down, this minute."

"Very good; hand 'em over, and I'll tell you."

"Truly, Dick?"

"Yes, and prove it."

Dolly produced her purse, and, bill in hand, sat waiting for the disclosure. Dick rose with a melodramatic bow:

"Lo, it was I."

"That's a great fib, for I saw you flying about the whole evening."

"You saw my dress, but I was not in it."

"Oh! oh! who *did* I keep going to, then? and what *did* I do to make a fool of myself, I wonder?"

Purse and bill dropped out of Dolly's hand, and she looked at her brother with a distracted expression of countenance. Dick rubbed his hands and chuckled.

"Here's a jolly state of things! Now I'll tell you the whole story. I never thought of doing it till I saw Bopp and told him who you were; but on my way for Fan I wondered if he'd get puzzled between you two; and then a grand idea popped into my head to puzzle him myself, for I can take you off to the life. Fan didn't want me to, but I made her, so she lent me hoops, and gown, and

the pink domino, and if ever I thanked my stars I wasn't tall, I did then, for the things fitted capitally as to length, though I kept splitting something down the back, and scattering hooks and eyes in all directions. I wish you could have heard Jack roar while they rigged me. He had no dress, so I lent him mine, till just before the masks were taken off, when we cut home and changed. He told me how you kept running to him to tie up your slippers, find your fan, and tell him funny things, thinking it was me. I never enjoyed anything so much in my life."

"Go on," said Dolly, in a breathless sort of voice, and the deluded boy obeyed.

"I knew Bopp, and hovered near till he came to find out who I was. I took you off in style, and it deceived him, for I'm only an inch or two taller than you, and kept my head down in the lackadaisical way you girls do; I whispered, so my voice didn't betray me; and was very clinging, and sweet, and fluttery, and that blessed old goose was sure it was you. I thought it was all over once, for when he came the heavy in the recess I got a bit flustered, he was so serious about it, my mask slipped, but I caught it, so he only saw my eyes and forehead, which are just like yours, and that finished him, for I've no doubt I looked as

red and silly as you would have done in a like fix."

"Why did you say No?" and Dolly looked as stern as fate.

"What else should I say? You told me you wouldn't have him, and I thought it would save you the bother of saying it, and him the pain of asking twice. I told him some time ago that you were a born flirt; he said he knew it; so I was surprised to hear him go on at such a rate, but supposed that I was too amiable, and that misled him. Poor old Bopp, I kept thinking of him all night, as he looked when he said, 'They told me you had no heart, now I believe it, and I thank you for that No.' It was rather a hard joke for him, but it's over now, and he won't have to do it again. You said I wouldn't *dare* tell him about you; didn't I? and haven't I won the——"

The rest of the sentence went spinning dizzily through Dick's head, as a sudden tingling sensation pervaded his left ear, followed by a similar smart in the right; and, for a moment, chaos seemed to have come again. Whatever Dolly did was thoroughly done: when she danced, the soles of her shoes attested the fact; when she flirted, it was warm work while it lasted; and when she was angry, it thundered, lightened, and blew great guns

till the shower came, and the whole affair ended in a rainbow. Therefore, being outwitted, disappointed, mortified and hurt, her first impulse was to find a vent for these conflicting emotions; and possessing skilful hands, she left them to avenge the wrong done her heart, which they did so faithfully, that if ever a young gentleman's ears were vigorously and completely boxed, Dick was that young individual. As the thunder-clap ceased, the gale began, and blew steadily for several minutes.

"You think it a joke, do you? I tell you it's a wicked, cruel thing; you've told a lie; you've broken August's heart, and made me so angry that I'll never forgive you as long as I live. What do you know about my feelings? and how dare you take it upon yourself to answer for me? You think because we are nearly the same age that I am no older than you, but you're mistaken, for a boy of eighteen *is* a boy, a girl of seventeen is often a woman, with a woman's hopes and plans; you don't understand this any more than you do August's love for me, which you listened to and laughed at. I said I didn't like him, and I didn't find out till afterward that I did; then I was afraid to tell you, lest you'd twit me with it. But now I care for no one, and I say I *do* like him—yes, I love him with all my heart, and soul, and might,

and I'd die this minute if I could undo the harm you've done, and see him happy! I know I've been selfish, vain, and thoughtless, but I am not now; I hoped he'd love me, hoped he'd see I cared for him, that I'd done trifling, and didn't mind if he *was* poor, for I'd enough for both; that I longed to make his life pleasant after all his troubles; that I'd send for the little sister he loves so well, and never let him suffer any more; for he is so good, so patient, so generous, and dear to me, I cannot do enough for him. Now it's all spoilt; now I can never tell him this, never comfort him in any way, never be happy again in all my life, and *you* have done it!"

As Dolly stood before her brother, pouring out her words with glittering eyes, impetuous voice, and face pale with passionate emotion, he was scared; for, as his scattered wits returned to him, he felt that he had been playing with edge-tools, and had cut and slashed in rather a promiscuous manner. Dazed and dizzy, he sat staring at the excited figure before him, forgetting the indignity he had received, the mistake he had made, the damage he had done, in simple wonder at the revolutions going on under his astonished eyes. When Dolly stopped for breath, he muttered with a contrite look:

"I'm very sorry—it was only fun; and I

thought it would help you both, for how the deuce should I know you liked the man when you said you hated him?"

"I never said that, and if I'd wanted advice I should have gone to mother. You men go blundering off with half an idea in your heads, and never see your stupidity till you have made a mess that can't be mended; we women don't work so, but save people's feelings, and are called hypocrites for our pains. I never meant to tell you, but I will now, to show you how I've been serving you, while you've been harming me: everyone of those notes from Fan which you admire so much, answer so carefully, and wear out in your pocket, though copied by her, were written by me."

"The dickins they were!" Up flew Dick, and clapping his hand on the left-breast pocket, out came a dozen pink notes tied up with a blue ribbon, and much the worse for wear. He hastily turned them over as Dolly went on.

"Yes, I did it, for she didn't know how to answer your notes, and came to me. I didn't laugh at them, or make fun of her, but helped her silly little wits, and made you a happy boy for three months, though you teased me day and night, for I loved you, and hadn't the heart to spoil your pleasure."

"You've done it now with a vengeance, and you're a pair of deceitful minxes. I've paid *you* off. I'll give Fan one more note that will keep her eyes red for a month; and I'll never love or trust a girl again as long as I live,—never! never!"

Red with wrath, Dick threw the treasured packet into the fire, punched it well down among the coals, flung away the poker, and turned about with a look and gesture which would have been very comical if they had not been decidedly pathetic, for, in spite of his years, a very tender heart beat under the blue jacket, and it was grievously wounded at the perfidy of the gentle little divinity whom he worshipped with daily increasing ardour. His eyes filled, but he winked resolutely; his lips trembled, but he bit them hard; his hands doubled themselves up, but he remembered his adversary was a woman; and, as a last effort to preserve his masculine dignity, he began to whistle.

As if the inconsistencies of womankind were to be shown him as rapidly as possible, at this moment the shower came on; for, taking him tenderly about the neck, Dolly fell to weeping so infectiously, that, after standing rigidly erect till a great tear dropped off the end of his nose, Dick gave in, and laying his head on Dolly's shoulder, the brother and sister quenched their anger,

washed away their malice, and smoothed their sorrow by one of those natural processes so kindly provided for poor humanity, and so often despised as a weakness when it might prove a better strength than any pride.

Dick cleared up first, with no sign of the tempest but a slight mist through which his native sunshine glimmered pensively.

"Don't, dear, don't cry so; it will make you sick, and won't do any good, for things will come right, or I'll make 'em, and we'll be comfortable all round."

"No, we never can be as we were, and it's all my fault. I've betrayed Fan's confidence, I've spoiled your little romance, I've been a thoughtless, wicked girl, I've lost August; and, oh, dear me, I wish I was dead!" with which funereal climax Dolly cried despairingly.

"Oh, come now, don't be dismal, and blame yourself for every trouble under the sun. Sit down and talk it over, and see what can be done. Poor old girl, I forgive you the notes, and say I was wrong to meddle with Bopp. I got you into the scrape, and I'll get you out if the sky don't fall

or Bopp blow his brains out, like a second Werther, before to-morrow."

Dick drew the animated fountain to the wide chair, where they had sat together since they were born, wiped her eyes, and patted her back, with an idea that it was soothing to babies, and why not to girls?

"I wish mother was at home," sighed Dolly, longing for that port which was always a haven of refuge in domestic squalls like this.

"Write, and tell her not to stay till Saturday."

"No, it would spoil her visit, and you know she deferred it to help us through this dreadful masquerade. But I don't know what to do."

"Why, bless your heart, it's simple enough. I'll tell Bopp, beg his pardon, say 'Dolly's willing,' and there you are all taut and ship-shape again."

"I wouldn't for the world, Dick. It would be very hard for you, very awkward for me, and do no good in the end; for August is so proud he'd never forgive you for such a trick, would never believe that I 'had a heart' after all you've said and I've done; and I should only hear with my own ears that he thanked me for that No. Oh, why can't people know when they are in love, and not go heels over head before they are ready!"

"Well, if that don't suit, I'll let it alone, for

that is all I can suggest; and if you like your woman's way better, try it, only you'll have to fly round, because to-morrow is the last night, you know."

"I shan't go, Dick."

"Why not? we are going to give him the rosewood set of things, have speeches, cheers for the King of Clubs, and no end of fun."

"I can't help it; there would be no fun for me, and I couldn't look him in the face after all this."

"Oh, pooh! yes you could, or it will be the first time you dared not do damage with those wicked eyes of yours."

"It is the first time I ever loved any one." Dolly's voice was so low, and her head dropped so much, that this brief confession was apparently put away in Dick's pocket; and, being an exceedingly novel one, filled that ardent youth with a desire to deposit a similar one in the other pocket, which, being emptied of its accustomed contents, left a somewhat aching void in itself and the heart underneath. After a moment's silence, he said:

"Well, if you won't go, you can settle it when he comes here, though I think we should all do better to confess coming home in the dark."

"He won't come here again, Dick."

"Won't he! that shows you don't know Bopp as well as I. He'll come to say good-bye, to thank mother for her kindness, and you and me for the little things we've done for him (I wish I'd left the last undone!), and go away like a gentleman, as he is,—see if he don't."

"Do you think so? Then I must see him."

"I'm sure he will, for we men don't bear malice and sulk and bawl when we come to grief this way, but stand up and take it without winking, like the young Spartan brick when the fox was digging into him, you know."

"Then of course you'll forgive Fan."

"I'll be hanged if I do," growled Dick.

"Ah ha! your theory is very good, sir, but your practice is bosh," quoted Dolly, with a gleam of the old mischief in her face.

Dick took a sudden turn through the room, burst out laughing, and came back, saying heartily:

"I'll own up; it is mean to feel so, and I'll think about forgiving you both; but she may stop up the hole in the wall, for she won't get any more letters just yet; and you may devote your epistolary powers to A. Bopp in future. Well, what is it? free your mind, and have done with it; but

don't make your nose red, or take the starch out of my collar with any more salt water, if you please."

"No, I won't; and I only want to say that, as you owe the explanation to us both, perhaps it would be best for you to tell August your part of the thing as you come home to-morrow, and then leave the rest to fate. I can't let him go away thinking me such a heartless creature, and once gone it will be too late to mend the matter. Can you do this without getting me into another scrape, do you think?"

"I haven't a doubt of it, and I call that sensible. I'll fix it capitally—go down on my knees in the mud, if it is necessary; treat you like eggs for fear of another smash-up; and bring him home in such a tip-top state, you'll only have to nod and find yourself Mrs. B. any day you like. Now let's kiss and be friends, and then go pitch into that pie for luncheon."

So they did; and an hour afterward were rioting in the garret under pretence of putting grandma's things away; for at eighteen, in spite of love and mischief, boys and girls have a spell to exorcise blue-devils, and a happy faculty of forgetting that "the world is hollow, and their dolls stuffed with sawdust."

Dick was right, for on the following evening, after the lesson, Mr. Bopp did go home with him, "to say good-bye, like a gentleman, as he was." Dolly got over her first greeting in the dusky hall, and as her guest passed on to the parlour, she popped her head out to ask anxiously:

"Did you say anything, Dick?"

"I couldn't; something has happened to him; he'll tell you about it. I'm going to see to the horse, so take your time, and do what you like;" with which vague information Dick vanished, and Dolly wished herself anywhere but where she was.

Mr. Bopp sat before the fire, looking so haggard and worn out that the girl's conscience pricked her sorely for her part in the change; but, plucking up her courage, she stirred briskly among the tea-cups, asking,—

"What shall I give you, sir?"

"Thank you, I haf no care to eat."

Something in his spiritless mien and sorrowful voice made Dolly's eyes fill; but knowing she must depend upon herself now, and make the best of her position, she said kindly, yet nervously:

"You look tired; let me do something for you if I can; shall I sing for you a little? you once said music rested you."

"You are kind; I think I could like that.

Excoose me if I am dull, I haf—yes, a little air if you please."

More and more disturbed by his absent, troubled manner, Dolly began a German song he had taught her, but before the first line was sung he stopped her with an imploring:

"For Gott sake not that! I cannot bear it this night; it was the last I sung her in the Vaterland."

"Mr. Bopp, what is it? Dick says you have a trouble; tell me, and let us help you if we can. Are you ill, in want, or has any one injured you in any way? Oh, let me help you!"

Tears had been streaming down Mr. Bopp's cheeks, but as she spoke he checked them, and tried to answer steadily:

"No, I am not ill; I haf no wants now, and no one has hurt me but in kindness; yet I haf so great a grief I could not bear it all alone, and so I came to ask a little sympathy from your good Mutter, who has been kind to me as if I was a son. She is not here, and I thought I would stop back my grief; but that moosic was too much; you pity me, and so I tell you. See, now! when I find things go bright with me, and haf a hope of much work, I take the little store I saved, I send it to my friend Carl Hoffman, who is coming from my home, and say, 'Bring Ulla to me now, for I

can make life go well to her, and I am hungry till I haf her in my arms again.' I tell no one, for I am bold to think that one day I come here with her in my hand, to let her thank you in her so sweet way for all you haf done for me. Well, I watch the wind, I count the days, I haf no rest for joy; and when Carl comes I fly to him. He gifs me back my store, he falls upon my neck and does not speak, then I know my little girl will never come, for she has gone to Himmel before I could make a home for her on earth. Oh, my Ulla! it is hard to bear;" and poor Mr. Bopp covered his face, and laid it down on his empty plate, as if he never cared to lift it up again.

Then Dolly forgot herself in her great sympathy, and, going to him, she touched the bent head with a soothing hand; let her tears flow to comfort his; and whispered in her tenderest voice:

"Dear Mr. Bopp, I wish I could cure this sorrow, but as I cannot, let me bear it with you; let me tell you how we loved the little child, and longed to see her; how we should have rejoiced to know you had so dear a friend to make your life happy in this strange land; how we shall grieve for your great loss, and long to prove our respect and love for you. I cannot say this as I ought, but, oh, be comforted, for you will see the child

again, and, remembering that she waits for you, you will be glad to go when God calls you to meet your Ulla in that other Fatherland."

"Ah, I will go now! I haf no wish to stay, for all my life is black to me. If I had found that other little friend to fill her place, I should not grieve so much, because she is weller there than I could make her here; but no, I wait for that other one; I save all my heart for her; I send it, but it comes back to me; then I know my hope is dead, and I am all alone in the strange land."

There was neither bitterness nor reproach in these broken words, only a patient sorrow, a regretful pain, as if he saw the two lost loves before him, and uttered over them an irrepressible lament. It was too much for Dolly, and with sudden resolution she spoke out fast and low:

"Mr. Bopp, that was a mistake. It was not me you saw at the masque; it was Dick. He played a cruel trick; he insulted you and wronged me by that deceit, and I find it very hard to pardon him."

"What! what is that?" and Mr. Bopp looked up with tears still shining in his beard, and intense surprise in every feature of his face.

Dolly turned scarlet, and her heart beat fast as she repeated with an unsteady voice:

"It was Dick, not me."

A cloud swept over Mr. Bopp's face, and he knit his brows for a moment as if Dolly had not been far from right when she said "he never would forgive the joke." Presently, he spoke in a tone she had never heard before—cold and quiet—and in his eye she thought she read contempt for her brother and herself.

"I see now, and I say no more but this; it was not kind when I so trusted you. Yet it is well, for you and Richardt are so one, I haf no doubt he spoke your wish."

Here was a desperate state of things. Dolly had done her best, yet he did not, or would not, understand, and before she could restrain them, the words slipped over her tongue:

"No! Dick and I never agree."

Mr. Bopp started, swept three spoons and a tea-cup off the table as he turned, for something in the hasty whisper reassured him. The colour sprang up to his cheek, the old warmth to his eye, the old erectness to his figure, and the eager accent to his voice. He rose, drew Dolly nearer, took her face between his hands, and bending, fixed on her a look tender, yet commanding, as he said, with an earnestness that stirred her as words had never done before:

"Dollee, *he* said No; do *you* say Yes?"

She could not speak, but her heart stood up in her eyes, and answered him so eloquently that he was satisfied.

"Thank the Lord, it's all right!" thought Dick, as, peeping in at the window ten minutes later, he saw Dolly enthroned upon Mr. Bopp's knee, both her hands in his, and an expression in her April countenance which proved that she found it natural and pleasant to be sitting there, with her head on the kind heart that loved her; to hear herself called "*meine leilchen;*" to know that she alone could comfort him for little Ulla's loss, and fill her empty place.

"They make a very pretty landscape, but too much honey isn't good for 'em, so I'll go in, and we'll eat, drink, and be merry in honour of the night."

He rattled the latch, and tramped on the mat, to warn them of his approach, and appeared just as Dolly was skimming into a chair, and Mr. Bopp picking up the spoons, which he dropped again to meet Dick, and kissing him on both cheeks, after the fashion of his country, as he said, pointing to Dolly:

"See, it's all fine again. I forgif you, and leave all blame to that bad spirit, Mephistopheles,

who has much pranks like that, but never pays one for their pain, as you haf me. Heart's dearest, come and say a friendly word to Richardt, then we will haf a little health: Long life and happiness to the King of Clubs and the Queen of Hearts."

"Yes, August, and as he's to be a farmer, we'll add another: 'Wiser wits and better manners to the Knave of Spades.'"

Mrs. Podgers' Teapot.

AH, dear me, dear me, I'm a deal too comfortable!" Judging from appearances, Mrs. Podgers certainly had some cause for that unusual exclamation. To begin with, the room was comfortable. It was tidy, bright, and warm; full of cosy corners and capital contrivances for quiet enjoyment. The chairs seemed to extend their plump arms invitingly; the old-fashioned sofa was so hospitable, that whoever sat down upon it was slow to get up; the pictures, though portraits, did not stare one out of countenance, but surveyed the scene with an air of tranquil enjoyment; and the unshuttered windows allowed the cheery light to shine out into the snowy street through blooming screens of Christmas roses and white chrysanthemums,

The fire was comfortable; for it was neither hidden in a stove nor imprisoned behind bars, but went rollicking up the wide chimney with a jovial roar. It flickered over the supper-table as if curious to discover what savoury viands were concealed under the shining covers. It touched up the old portraits till they seemed to wink; it covered the walls with comical shadows, as if the portly chairs had set their arms akimbo and were dancing a jig; it flashed out into the street with a voiceless greeting to every passer-by; it kindled mimic fires in the brass and irons and the teapot simmering on the hob, and, best of all, it shone its brightest on Mrs. Podgers, as if conscious that it couldn't do a better thing.

Mrs. Podgers was comfortable as she sat there, buxom, blooming, and brisk, in spite of her forty years and her widow's cap. Her black gown was illuminated to such an extent that it couldn't look sombre; her cap had given up trying to be prim long ago, and cherry ribbons wouldn't have made it more becoming as it set off her crisp black hair, and met in a coquettish bow under her plump chin; her white apron encircled her trim waist, as if conscious of its advantages; and the mourning-pin upon her bosom actually seemed to twinkle with satisfaction at the enviable post it occupied

The sleek cat, purring on the hearth, was comfortable, so was the agreeable fragrance of muffins that pervaded the air, so was the drowsy tick of the clock in the corner; and if anything was needed to give a finishing touch to the general comfort of the scene, the figure pausing in the doorway supplied the want most successfully.

Heroes are always expecting to be young and comely, also fierce, melancholy, or at least what novel-readers call "interesting;" but I am forced to own that my present hero was none of these. Half the real beauty, virtue, and romance of the world gets put into humble souls, hidden in plain bodies. Mr. Jerusalem Turner was an example of this; and, at the risk of shocking my sentimental readers, I must frankly state that he was fifty, stout, and bald, also that he used bad grammar, had a double chin, and was only the Co. in a prosperous grocery store. A hale and hearty old gentleman, with cheerful brown eyes, a ruddy countenance, and curly grey hair sticking all round his head, with an air of energy and independence that was pleasant to behold. There he stood, beaming upon the unconscious Mrs. Podgers, softly rubbing his hands, and smiling to himself with the air of a man enjoying the chief satisfaction of his life, as he was.

"Ah, dear me, dear me, I'm a deal too comfortable!" sighed Mrs. Podgers, addressing the teapot.

"Not a bit, mum, not a bit."

In walked the gentleman, and up rose the lady, saying, with a start and an aspect of relief:

"Bless me, I didn't hear you! I began to think you were never coming to your tea, Mr. 'Rusalem."

Everybody called him Mr. 'Rusalem, and many people were ignorant that he had any other name. He liked it, for it began with the children, and the little voices had endeared it to him, not to mention the sound of it from Mrs. Podgers' lips for ten years.

"I know I'm late, mum, but I really couldn't help it. To-night's a busy time, and the lads are just good for nothing with their jokes and spirits, so I stayed to steady 'em, and do a little job that turned up unexpected."

"Sit right down and have your tea while you can, then. I've kept it warm for you, and the muffins are done lovely."

Mrs. Podgers bustled about with an alacrity that seemed to give an added relish to the supper; and when her companion was served, she sat smiling at him with her hand on the teapot,

ready to replenish his cup before he could ask for it.

"Have things been fretting of you, mum? You looked down-hearted as I came in, and that ain't accordin' to the time of year, which is merry," said Mr. 'Rusalem, stirring his tea with the sense of solid satisfaction that would have sweetened a far less palatable draught.

"It's the teapot; I don't know what's got into it to-night; but, as I was waiting for you, it set me thinking of one thing and another, till I declare I felt as if it had up and spoke to me, showing me how I wasn't grateful enough for my blessings, but a deal more comfortable than I deserved."

While speaking, Mrs. Podgers' eyes rested on an inscription which encircled the corpulent little silver teapot: "*To our Benefactor.—They who give to the poor lend to the Lord.*" Now one wouldn't think there was anything in the speech or the inscription to disturb Mr. 'Rusalem; but there seemed to be, for he fidgeted in his chair, dropped his fork, and glanced at the teapot with a very odd expression. It was a capital little teapot, solid, bright as hands could make it, and ornamented with a robust young cherub perched upon the lid, regardless of the warmth of his seat. With her

eyes still fixed upon it, Mr. Podgers continued meditatively:

"You know how fond I am of the teapot for poor Podgers' sake. I really feel quite superstitious about it; and when thoughts come to me, as I sit watching it, I have faith in them, because they always remind me of the past."

Here, after vain efforts to restrain himself, Mr. 'Rusalem broke into a sudden laugh, so hearty and infectious that Mrs. Podgers couldn't help smiling, even while she shook her head at him.

"I beg pardon, mum, it's hysterical; I'll never do it, again," panted Mr. 'Rusalem as he got his breath, and went soberly on with his supper.

It was a singular fact that whenever the teapot was particularly alluded to, he always behaved in this incomprehensible manner—laughed, begged pardon, said it was hysterical, and promised never to do it again. It used to trouble Mrs. Podgers very much, but she had grown used to it; and having been obliged to overlook many oddities in the departed Podgers, she easily forgave 'Rusalem his only one. After the laugh there was a pause, during which Mrs. Podgers sat absently polishing up the silver cherub, with the memory of the little son who died two Christmases ago lying heavy at her heart, and Mr. 'Rusalem seemed to be turning

something over in his mind as he watched a bit of butter sink luxuriously into the warm bosom of a muffin. Once or twice he paused as if listening, several times he stole a look at Mrs. Podgers, and presently said, in a somewhat anxious tone:

"You was saying just now that you was a deal too comfortable, mum; would you wish to be made uncomfortable in order to realize your blessings?"

"Yes, I should. I'm getting lazy, selfish, and forgetful of other folks. You leave me nothing to do, and make everything so easy for me that I'm growing young and giddy again. Now, that isn't as it should be, 'Rusalem."

"It meets my views exactly, mum. You've had your hard times, your worryments and cares, and now it's right to take your rest."

"Then why don't you take yours? I'm sure you've earned it drudging thirty years in the store, with more extra work than holidays for your share."

"Oh, well, mum, it's different with me, you know. Business is amusing; and I'm so used to it, I shouldn't know myself if I was out of the store for good."

"Well, I hope you are saving up something against the time when business won't be amusing.

You are so generous, I'm afraid you forget you can't work for other people all your days."

"Yes, mum, I've put by a little sum in a safe bank that pays good interest, and when I'm past work I'll fall back and enjoy it."

To judge from the cheerful content of the old gentleman's face, he was enjoying it already, as he looked about him with the air of a man who had made a capital investment, and was in the receipt of generous dividends. Seeing Mrs. Podgers' bright eye fixed upon him, as if she suspected something, and would have the truth out of him in two minutes, he recalled the conversation to the point from which it had wandered.

"If you would like to try how a little misery suits you, mum, I can accommodate you, if you'll step up-stairs."

"Good gracious, what do you mean? Who's up there? Why didn't you tell me before?" cried Mrs. Podgers, in a flutter of interest, curiosity, and surprise, as he knew she would be.

"You see, mum, I was doubtful how you'd like it. I did it without stopping to think, and then I was afraid you'd consider it a liberty."

"Mr. 'Rusalem spoke with some hesitation; but Mrs. Podgers didn't wait to hear him, for she was already at the door, lamp in hand, and would

have been off had she known where to go, "upstairs" being a somewhat vague expression. The old gentleman led the way to the room he had occupied for thirty years, in spite of Mrs. Podgers' frequent offers of a better and brighter one. He was attached to it, small and dark as it was, for the joys and sorrows of more than half his life had come to him in that little room, and somehow when he was there it brightened up amazingly. Mrs. Podgers looked well about her, but saw nothing new, and her conductor said, as he paused beside the bed:

"Let me tell you how I found it before I show it. You see, mum, I had to step down the street just at dark, and passing the windows I gave a glance in, as I've a bad habit of doing when the lamps is lighted and you a setting there alone. Well, mum, what did I see outside but a ragged little chap a flattening his nose against the glass, and staring in with all his eyes. I didn't blame him much for it, and on I goes without a word. When I came back I see him a lying close to the wall, and mistrusting that he was up to some game that might give you a scare, I speaks to him: he don't answer; I touches him: he don't stir; then I picks him up, and seeing that he's gone in a fit or a faint, I makes for the store with a will. He

come to rapid; and finding that he was most froze and starved, I fed and warmed and fixed him a trifle, and then tucked him away here, for he's got no folks to worry for him, and was too used up to go out again to-night. That's the story, mum; and now I'll produce the little chap, if I can find him."

With that Mr. 'Rusalem began to grope about the bed, chuckling, yet somewhat anxious, for not a vestige of an occupant appeared, till a dive downward produced a sudden agitation of the clothes, a squeak, and the unexpected appearance out at the foot of the bed of a singular figure, that dodged into a corner, with one arm up, as if to ward off a blow, while a sleepy little voice exclaimed, beseechingly:

"I'm up, I'm up—don't hit me!"

"Lord love the child, who'd think of doing that! Wake up, Joe, and see your friends," said Mr. 'Rusalem, advancing cautiously.

At the sound of his voice down went the arm, and Mrs. Podgers saw a boy of nine or ten, arrayed in a flannel garment that evidently belonged to Mr. 'Rusalem, for, though none too long, it was immensely broad, and the voluminous sleeves were pinned up, showing a pair of wasted arms, chapped with cold and mottled with bruises. A

large blue sock still covered one foot, the other was bound up as if hurt. A tall cotton nightcap, garnished with a red tassel, looked like a big extinguisher on a small candle; and from under it a pair of dark, hollow eyes glanced sharply with a shrewd, suspicious look, that made the little face more pathetic than the marks of suffering, neglect, and abuse, which told the child's story without words. As if quite reassured by 'Rusalem's presence, the boy shuffled out of his corner, saying coolly, as he prepared to climb into his nest again:

"I thought it was the old one when you grabbed me. Ain't this bed a first-rater, though?"

Mr. 'Rusalem lifted the composed young personage into the middle of the big bed, where he sat bolt upright, surveying the prospect from under the extinguisher with an equanimity that quite took the good lady's breath away. But Mr. 'Rusalem fell back and pointed to him, saying, "There he is, mum," with as much pride and satisfaction as if he had found some rare and valuable treasure; for the little child was very precious in his sight. Mrs. Podgers really didn't know whether to laugh or cry, and settled the matter by plumping down beside the boy, saying, cordially, as she took the grimy little hands into her own:

"He's heartily welcome, 'Rusalem. Now tell all about it, my poor dear, and don't be afraid."

"Ho, I ain't afraid a you nor he. I ain't got nothin' to tell, only my name's Joe and I'm sleepy."

"Who is your mother, and where do you live, deary?" asked Mrs. Podgers, haunted with the idea that some woman must be anxious for the child.

"Ain't got any—we don't have 'em where I lives. The old one takes care a me."

"Who is the old one?"

"Granny. I works for her, and she lets me stay alonger her."

"Bless the dear! what work can such a mite do?"

"Heaps a things. I sifs ashes, picks rags, goes beggin', runs arrants, and sometimes the big fellers lets me call papers. That's fun, only I gets knocked round, and it hurts, you'd better believe."

"Did you come here begging, and, being afraid to ring, stand outside looking in at me enjoying myself, like a selfish creeter as I am?"

"I forgot to ask for the cold vittles a lookin' at warm ones, and thinkin' if they was mine what I'd give the little fellers when I has my tree."

"Your what, child?"

"My Christmas tree. Look a here, I've got it, and all these to put on it to-morrer."

From under his pillow the boy produced a small branch of hemlock, dropped from some tree on its passage to a gayer festival than little Joe's; also an old handkerchief which contained his treasures—only a few odds and ends picked up in the streets: a gnarly apple, half a dozen nuts, two or three dingy bonbons, gleaned from the sweepings of some store, and a bit of cheese, which last possession he evidently prized highly.

"That's for the old one; she likes it, and I kep' it for her—cause she don't hit so hard when I fetch her goodies. You don't mind, do you?" he said, looking inquiringly at Mr. 'Rusalem, who blew his nose like a trumpet, and patted the big nightcap with a fatherly gesture more satisfactory than words.

"What have you kept for yourself, dear?" asked Mrs. Podgers, with an irrepressible sniff, as she looked at the poor little presents, and remembered that they "didn't have mothers" where the child lived.

"Oh, I had my treat alonger him," said the boy, nodding toward 'Rusalem, and adding enthusiastically, "Wasn't that prime? It was real

Christmasy a settin' by the fire, eatin' lots and not bein' hit."

Here Mrs. Podgers broke down; and, taking the boy in her arms, sobbed over him as if she had found her lost Neddy in this sad shape. The little lad regarded her demonstration with some uneasiness at first; but there is a magic about a genuine woman that wins its way everywhere, and soon the outcast nestled to her, feeling that this wonderful night was getting more "Christmasy" every minute.

Mrs. Podgers was herself again directly; and seeing that the child's eyelids were heavy with weakness and weariness, she made him comfortable among the pillows, and began to sing the lullaby that used to hush her little son to sleep. Mr. 'Rusalem took something from his drawer, and was stealing away, when the child opened his eyes and started up, calling out as he nodded, till the tassel danced on this preposterous cap:

"I say! good night, good night!"

Looking much gratified, Mr. 'Rusalem returned, shook the little hand extended to him, kissed the grateful face, and went away to sit on the stairs with tear after tear dropping off the end of his nose, as he listened to the voice that, after two years of silence, sung the air this simple soul

thought the loveliest in the world. At first it was more sob than song, but soon the soothing music flowed on unbroken, and the wondering child, for the first time within his memory, fell asleep in the sweet shelter of a woman's arms.

When Mrs. Podgers came out, she found Mr. 'Rusalem intent on stuffing another parcel into a long grey stocking already full to overflowing.

"For the little chap, mum. He let fall that he'd never done this sort of thing in his life, and as he hadn't any stockings of his own, poor dear, I took the liberty of lending him one of mine," explained Mr. 'Rusalem, surveying the knobby article with evident regret that it wasn't bigger.

Mrs. Podgers said nothing, but looked from the stocking to the fatherly old gentleman who held it, and it is my private belief, that if Mrs. Podgers had obeyed the impulse of her heart, she would have forgotten decorum, and kissed him on the spot. She didn't, however, but went briskly into her own room, whence she presently returned with red eyes, and a pile of small garments in her hands. Having nearly exhausted his pincushion in trying to suspend the heavy stocking, Mr. 'Rusalem had just succeeded as she appeared. He saw what she carried, watched her arrange the little shirt, jacket, and trousers, the half-worn

shoes and tidy socks, beside the bed, with motherly care, and stand looking at the unconscious child with an expression which caused Mr. 'Rusalem to dart downstairs and compose himself by rubbing his hair erect, and shaking his fist in the painted face of the late Podgers.

An hour or two later the store was closed, the room cleared, Mrs. Podgers in her arm-chair on one side of the hearth, with her knitting in her hand, Mr. 'Rusalem in his arm-chair on the other side, with his newspaper on his knee, both looking so cosy and comfortable that any one would have pronounced them a Darby and Joan on the spot. Ah, but they weren't, you see, and that spoilt the illusion, to one party at least. Both were rather silent, both looked thoughtfully at the fire, and the fire gave them both excellent counsel, as it seldom fails to do when it finds any kindred warmth and brightness in the hearts and souls of those who study it. Mrs. Podgers kindled first, and broke out suddenly with a nod of great determination.

"'Rusalem, I'm going to keep that boy, if it's possible."

"You shall, mum, whether it's possible or not," he answered, nodding back at her with equal decision.

"I don't know why I never thought of such a

thing before. There's a many children suffering for mothers, and heaven knows I'm wearying for some little child to fill my Neddy's place. I wonder if you didn't think of this when you took that boy in; it would be just like you."

Mr. 'Rusalem shook his head, but looked so guilty that Mrs. Podgers was satisfied, and called him "a thoughtful dear" within herself, and kindled still more.

"Between you, and Joe, and the teapot, I've got another idea into my stupid head, and I know you won't laugh at it. That loving little soul has tried to get a tree for some poor babies who have no one to think of them but him, and even remembered the old one, who must be a wretch to hit that child, and hit hard, too, I know by the looks of his arms. Well, I've a great longing to go and give him a tree—a right good one, like those Neddy used to have; to get in the 'little fellers' he tells of, give them a good dinner, and then a regular Christmas frolic. Can't it be done?"

"Nothing could be easier, mum;" and Mr. 'Rusalem, who had been taking counsel with the fire till he quite glowed with warmth and emotion, nodded, smiled, and rubbed his hands, as if Mrs. Podgers had invited him to a Lord Mayor's feast, or some equally gorgeous jollification.

"I suppose it's the day, and thinking of how it came to be, that makes me feel as if I wanted to help everybody, and makes this Christmas so bright and happy that I can never forget it," continued the good woman, with a heartiness that made her honest face quite beautiful to behold.

If Mrs. Podgers had only known what was going on under the capacious waistcoat opposite she would have held her tongue; for the more charitable, earnest, and tender-hearted she grew, the harder it became for Mr. 'Rusalem to restrain the declaration which had been hovering on his lips ever since old Podgers died. As the comely relict sat there talking in that genial way, and glowing with good-will to all mankind, it was too much for Mr. 'Rusalem; and finding it impossible to resist the desire to know his fate, he yielded to it, gave a portentous hem, and said abruptly:

"'Well, mum, have I done it?"

"Done what?" asked Mrs. P., going on with her work.

"Made you uncomfortable, according to promise."

"Oh dear, no, you've made me very happy, and will have to try again," she answered, laughing.

"I will, mum."

As he spoke, Mr. 'Rusalem drew his chair

nearer, leaned forward, and looking straight at her, said deliberately, though his voice shook a little:

"Mrs. Podgers, I love you heartily; would you have any objections to marrying of me?"

Not a word said Mrs. Podgers; but her knitting dropped out of her hand, and she looked as uncomfortable as she could desire.

"I thought that would do it," muttered Mr. 'Rusalem, but went on steadily, though his ruddy face got paler and paler, his voice huskier and huskier, and his heart fuller and fuller every word he attempted.

"You see, mum, I have took the liberty of loving you ever since you came, more than ten years ago. I was eager to make it known long before this, but Podgers spoke first, and then it was no use. It came hard for a time, but I learned to give you up, though I couldn't learn not to love you, being as it was impossible. Since Podgers died I've turned it over in my mind frequent, but felt as if I was too old, and rough, and poor every way to ask so much. Lately, the wish has growed too strong for me, and to-night it won't be put down. If you want a trial, mum, I should be that I'll warrant, for do my best, I could never be all I'm wishful of being for your sake. Would you

give it name, and if not agreeable, we'll let it drop, mum, we'll let it drop."

If it hadn't been for the teapot, Mrs. Podgers would have said Yes at once. The word was on her lips, but as she looked up the fire flashed brightly on the teapot (which always occupied the place of honour on the sideboard, for Mrs. P. was intensely proud of it), and she stopped to think, for it reminded her of something. In order to explain this, we must keep Mr. 'Rusalem waiting for his answer a minute.

Rather more than ten years ago, old Podgers happening to want a housekeeper, invited a poor relation to fill that post in his bachelor establishment. He never would have thought of marrying her, though the young woman was both notable and handsome, if he hadn't discovered that his partner loved her. Whereupon the perverse old fellow immediately proposed, lest he should lose his housekeeper, and was accepted from motives of gratitude. Mrs. Podgers was a dutiful wife, but not a very happy one, for the world said that Mr. P. was a hard, miserly man, and his wife was forced to believe the world in the right, till the teapot changed her opinion. There happened to be much suffering among the poor one year, owing to the burning of the mills, and contributions were

solicited for their relief. Old Podgers, though a rich man, refused to give a penny, but it was afterwards discovered that his private charities exceeded many more ostentatious ones, and the word "miserly" was changed to "peculiar." When times grew prosperous again, the workmen, whose families had been so quietly served, clubbed together, got the teapot, and left it at Mr. Podgers' door one Christmas Eve. But the old gentleman never saw it; his dinner had been too much for him, and apoplexy took him off that very afternoon.

In the midst of her grief Mrs. Podgers was surprised, touched, and troubled by this revelation, for she had known nothing of the affair till the teapot came. Womanlike, she felt great remorse for what now seemed like blindness and ingratitude; she fancied she owed him some atonement, and remembering how often he had expressed a hope that she wouldn't marry again after he was gone, she resolved to gratify him. The buxom widow had had many opportunities of putting off her weeds, but she had refused all offers without regret till now. The teapot reminded her of Podgers and her vow; and though her heart rebelled, she thought it her duty to check the answer that sprang to her lips, and slowly, but decidedly, replied:

"I'm truly grateful to you, 'Rusalem, but I couldn't do it. Don't you think you'd ever be a trial, for you're the last man to be that to any woman. It's a feeling I have that it wouldn't be kind to Podgers. I can't forget how much I owe him, how much I wronged him, and how much I can please him by staying as I am, for his frequent words were, 'Keep the property together, and don't marry, Jane.'"

"Very well, mum, then we'll let it drop, and fall back into the old ways. Don't fret yourself about it, I shall bear up, and—" there Mr. 'Rusalem's voice gave out, and he sat frowning at the fire, bent on bearing up manfully, though it was very hard to find that Podgers dead as well as Podgers living was to keep from him the happiness he had waited for so long. His altered face and broken voice were almost too much for Mrs. P., and she found it necessary to confirm her resolution by telling it. Laying one hand on his shoulder, she pointed to the teapot with the other, saying gently:

"The day that came and I found out how good he was, too late to beg his pardon and love him for it, I said to myself, 'I'll be true to Podgers till I die, because that's all I can do now to show my repentance and respect.' But for that feeling and that promise I couldn't say No to you, 'Rusalem,

for you've been my best friend all these years, and I'll be yours all my life, though I can't be anything else, my dear."

For the first time since its arrival, the mention of the teapot did not produce the accustomed demonstration from Mr. 'Rusalem. On the contrary, he looked at it with a momentary expression of indignation and disgust, strongly suggestive of an insane desire to cast the precious relic on the floor and trample on it. If any such temptation did assail him, he promptly curbed it, and looked about the room with a forlorn air, that made Mrs. Podgers hate herself, as he meekly answered:

"I'm obliged to you, mum; the feeling does you honour. Don't mind me, it's rather a blow, but I'll be up again directly."

He retired behind his paper as he spoke, and Mrs. Podgers spoilt her knitting in respectful silence, till Mr. 'Rusalem began to read aloud as usual, to assure her that in spite of the blow he was up again.

In the grey dawn the worthy gentleman was roused from his slumbers, by a strange voice whispering shrilly in his ear:

"I say, there's two of 'em. Ain't it jolly?"

Starting up, he beheld a comical little goblin standing at his bedside, with a rapturous expres-

sion of countenance, and a pair of long grey stockings in its hands. Both were heaping full, but one was evidently meant for Mr. 'Rusalem, for every wish, whim and fancy of his had been guessed, and gratified in a way that touched him to the heart. If it were not indecorous to invade the privacy of a gentleman's apartment, I could describe how there were two boys in the big bed that morning; how the old boy revelled in the treasures of his stockings as heartily as the young one; how they laughed and exclaimed, pulled each other's nightcaps off, and had a regular pillow fight; how little Joe was got into his new clothes, and strutted like a small peacock in them; how Mr. 'Rusalem made himself splendid in his Sunday best, and spent ten good minutes in tying the fine cravat somebody had hemmed for him. But lest it should be thought improper, I will merely say, that nowhere in the city did the sun shine on happier faces than these two showed Mrs. Podgers, as Mr. 'Rusalem came in with Joe on his shoulder, both wishing her a merry Christmas, as heartily as if this were the first the world had ever seen.

Mrs. Podgers was as brisk and blithe as they, though she must have sat up one-half the night making presents for them, and laid awake the other half making plans for the day. As soon as she had

hugged Joe, toasted him red, and heaped his plate with everything on the table, she told them the order of performances.

"As soon as ever you can't eat any more you must order home the tree, 'Rusalem, and then go with Joe to invite the party, while I see to dinner, and dress up the pine as well as I can in such a hurry."

"Yes, mum," answered Mr. 'Rusalem with alacrity; though how she was going to do her part was not clear to him. But he believed her capable of working any miracle within the power of mortal woman; and having plans of his own, he soon trudged away with Joe prancing at his side, so like the lost Neddy, in the little cap and coat, that Mrs. Podgers forgot her party to stand watching them down the crowded street, with eyes that saw very dimly when they looked away again.

Never mind how she did it, the miracle was wrought for Mrs. Podgers and her maid Betsy fell to work with a will, and when women set their hearts on anything it is a known fact that they seldom fail to accomplish it. By noon everything was ready, the tree waiting in the best parlour, the dinner smoking on the table, and Mrs. Podgers at the window to catch the first glimpse of her coming guests. A last thought struck her as she stood

waiting. There was but one high chair in the house, and the big ones would be doubtless too low for the little people. Bent on making them as comfortable as her motherly heart could desire, she set about mending the matter by bringing out from Podgers' bookcase several fat old ledgers, and arranging them in the chairs. While busily dusting one of these it slipped from her hands, and as it fell a paper fluttered from among the leaves. She picked it up, looked at it, dropped her duster, and became absorbed. It was a small sheet filled with figures, and here and there short memoranda—not an interesting looking document in the least; but Mrs. Podgers stood like a statue till she had read it several times; then she caught her breath, clapped her hands, laughed and cried together, and put the climax to her extraordinary behaviour by running across the room and embracing the astonished little teapot.

How long she would have gone on in this wild manner it is impossible to say, had not the jingle of bells, and a shrill, small cheer announced that the party had arrived. Whisking the mysterious paper into her pocket, and dressing her agitated countenance in smiles, she hastened to open the door before chilly fingers could find the bell.

Such a merry load as that was! Such happy

faces looking out from under the faded hoods and caps! Such a hearty "Hurrah for Mrs. Podgers!" greeted her straight from the grateful hearts that loved her the instant she appeared! And what a perfect Santa Claus Mr. 'Rusalem made, with his sleigh full of bundles as well as children, his face full of sunshine, his arms full of babies, whom he held up that they too might clap their little hands, while he hurrahed with all his might. I really don't think reindeers, or the immemorial white beard and fur cap, could have improved the picture; and the neighbours were of my opinion, I suspect.

It was good to see Mrs. Podgers welcome them all in a way that gave the shyest courage, made the poorest forget patched jackets or ragged gowns, and caused them all to feel that this indeed was merry Christmas. It was better still to see Mrs. Podgers preside over the table, dealing out turkey and pudding with such a bounteous hand, that the small feasters often paused, in sheer astonishment, at the abundance before them, and then fell to again with renewed energy, as if they feared to wake up presently and find the whole a dream. It was best of all to see Mrs. Podgers gather them about her afterwards, hearing their little stories, learning their many wants, and winning their

young hearts by such gentle wiles, that they soon regarded her as some beautiful, benignant fairy, who had led them from a cold, dark world into the land of innocent delights they had imagined, longed for, yet never hoped to find.

Then came the tree, hung thick with bonbons, fruit and toys, gay mittens and tippets, comfortable socks and hoods, and, lower down, more substantial but less showy gifts; for Mrs. Podgers had nearly exhausted the Dorcas basket that fortunately chanced to be with her just then. There was no time for candles, but, as if he understood the matter and was bent on supplying all deficiencies, the sun shone gloriously on the little tree, and made it doubly splendid in the children's eyes.

It would have touched the hardest heart to watch the poor little creatures, as they trooped in and stood about the wonderful tree. Some seemed ready to go wild with delight, some folded their hands and sighed with solemn satisfaction, others looked as if bewildered by such unwonted and unexpected good fortune; and when Mr. 'Rusalem told them how this fruitful tree had sprung up from their loving playmate's broken bough, little Joe hid his face in Mrs. Podgers' gown, and could find no vent for his great happiness but tears. It was not a large tree, but it took a long while to

strip it; and even when the last gilded nut was gone, the children still lingered about it, as if they regarded it with affection as a generous benefactor, and were loath to leave it.

Next they had a splendid round of games. I don't know what will be thought of the worthy souls, but Mr. 'Rusalem and Mrs. Podgers played with all their might. Perhaps the reason why he gave himself up so freely to the spirit of the hour was, that his disappointment was very heavy; and, according to his simple philosophy, it was wiser to soothe his wounded heart and cheer his sad spirit with the sweet society of little children, than to curse fate and reproach a woman. What was Mrs. Podgers' reason it is impossible to tell, but she behaved as if some secret satisfaction filled her heart so full that she was glad to let it bubble over in this harmless fashion. Both tried to be children again, and both succeeded capitally, though now and then their hearts got the better of them. When Mr. 'Rusalem was blinded he tossed all the little lads up to the ceiling, when he caught them, kissed all the little girls, and, that no one might feel slighted, kissed Mrs. Podgers also. When they played "Open the gates," and the two grown people stood hand in hand while the mirthful troops marched under the tall arch, Mrs. Podgers

never once looked Mr. 'Rusalem in the face, but blushed and kept her eyes on the ground, as if she was a bashful girl playing games with some boyish sweetheart. The children saw nothing of all this, and, bless their innocent little hearts! they wouldn't have understood it if they had; but it was perfectly evident that the grey-headed gentleman and the mature matron had forgotten all about their years, and were in their teens again; for true love is gifted with immortal youth.

When weary with romping, they gathered round the fire, and Mr. 'Rusalem told fairy tales, as if his dull ledgers had preserved these childish romances like flowers between their leaves, and kept them fresh in spite of time. Mrs. Podgers sung to them, and made them sing with her, till passers-by smiled and lingered as the childish voices reached them, and, looking through the screen of roses, they caught glimpses of the happy little group singing in the ruddy circle of that Christmas fire.

It was a very humble festival, but with these poor guests came also Love and Charity, Innocence and Joy,—the strong, sweet spirits who bless and beautify the world; and though eclipsed by many more splendid celebrations, I think the day was

the better and the blither for Mrs. Podgers' little party.

When it was all over,—the grateful farewells and riotous cheers as the children were carried home, the twilight raptures of Joe, and the long lullaby before he could extinguish himself enough to go to sleep, the congratulations and clearing up, —then Mr. 'Rusalem and Mrs. Podgers sat down to tea. But no sooner were they alone together than Mrs. P. fell into a curious flutter, and did the oddest things. She gave Mr. 'Rusalem warm water instead of tea, passed the slop-bowl when he asked for the sugar-basin, burnt her fingers, laid her handkerchief on the tray, and tried to put her fork in her pocket, and went on in such a way that Mr. 'Rusalem began to fear the day had been too much for her.

"You're tired, mum," he said presently, hearing her sigh.

"Not a bit," she answered briskly, opening the teapot to add more water, but seemed to forget her purpose, and sat looking into its steamy depths as if in search of something. If it was courage, she certainly found it, for all of a sudden she handed the mysterious paper to Mr. 'Rusalem saying solemnly:

"Read that, and tell me if it's true."

He took it readily, put on his glasses, and bent to examine it, but gave a start that caused the spectacles to fly off his nose, as he exclaimed:

"Lord bless me, he said he'd burnt it!"

"Then it *is* true? Don't deny it, 'Rusalem; it's no use, for I've caught you at last!" and in her excitement Mrs. Podgers slapped down the teapot-lid as if she had got him inside.

"I assure you, mum, he promised to burn it. He made me write down the sums, and so on, to satisfy him that I hadn't took more'n my share of the profits. It was my own; and though he called me a fool he let me do as I liked, but I never thought it would come up again like this, mum."

"Of course you didn't, for it was left in one of the old ledgers we had down for the dears to sit on. I found it, I read it, and I understood it in a minute. It was you who helped the mill-people, and then hid behind Podgers because you didn't want to be thanked. When he died, and the teapot came, you saw how proud I was of it,—how I took comfort in thinking he did the kind things; and for my sake you never told the truth, not even last night, when a word would have done so much. Oh, 'Rusalem, how could you deceive me all these years?"

If Mr. 'Rusalem had desired to answer he would have had no chance; for Mrs. Podgers was too much in earnest to let any one speak but herself, and hurried on, fearing that her emotion would get the better of her before she had had her say.

"It was like you, but it wasn't right, for you've robbed yourself of the love and honour that was your due; you've let people praise Podgers when he didn't deserve it; you've seen me take pride in this because I thought he'd earned it; and you've only laughed at it all as if it was a fine joke to do generous things and never take the credit of 'em. Now I know what bank you've laid up your hard earnings in, and what a blessed interest you'll get by and by. Truly they who give to the poor lend to the Lord,—and you don't need to have the good words written on silver, for you keep 'em always in your heart."

Mrs. Podgers stopped a minute for breath, and felt that she was going very fast; for 'Rusalem sat looking at her with so much humility, love, and longing in his honest face, that she knew it would be all up with her directly.

"You saw how I grieved for Neddy, and gave me this motherless boy to fill his place; you know I wanted some one to make the house seem like

home again, and you offered me the lovingest heart that ever was. You found I wasn't satisfied to lead such a selfish life, and you showed me how beautiful Charity could make it; you taught me to find my duty waiting for me at my own door; and, putting by your own trouble, you've helped to make this day the happiest Christmas of my life."

If it hadn't been for the teapot Mrs. Podgers would have given out here; but her hand was still on it, and something in the touch gave her steadiness for one more burst.

"I loved the little teapot for Podgers' sake; now I love it a hundred times more for yours, because you've brought its lesson home to me in a way I never can forget, and have been my benefactor as well as theirs, who shall soon know you as well as I do. 'Rusalem, there's only one way in which I can thank you for all this, and I do it with all my heart. Last night you asked me for something, and I thought I couldn't give it to you. Now I'm sure I can, and if you still want it why ——"

Mrs. Podgers never finished that sentence; for, with an impetuosity surprising in one of his age and figure, Mr. 'Rusalem sprang out of his chair and took her in his arms, saying tenderly,

in a voice almost inaudible, between a conflicting choke and chuckle:

"My dear! my dear! God bless you!"

A Hospital Christmas.

MERRY Christmas!" "Merry Christmas!" "Merry Christmas, and lots of 'em!" echoed from every side, as Miss Hale entered her ward in the grey December dawn. No wonder the greetings were hearty, that thin faces brightened, and eyes watched for the coming of this small luminary more eagerly than for the rising of the sun; for when they woke that morning, each man found that in the silence of the night some friendly hand had laid a little gift beside his bed. Very humble little gifts they were, but well chosen and thoughtfully bestowed by one who made the blithe anniversary pleasant even in a hospital, and sweetly taught the lesson of the hour—Peace on earth, goodwill to man.

"I say, ma'am, these are just splendid. I've

dreamt about such for a week, but I never thought I'd get 'em," cried one poor fellow, surveying a fine bunch of grapes with as much satisfaction as if he had found a fortune.

"Thank you kindly, miss, for the paper and the fixings. I hated to keep borrowing, but I hadn't any money," said another, eyeing his gift with happy anticipations of the home letters with which the generous pages should be filled.

"They are dreadful soft and pretty, but I don't believe I'll ever wear them out; my legs are so wimbly, there's no go in 'em," whispered a fever patient, looking sorrowfully at the swollen feet ornamented with a pair of carpet slippers gay with roses, and evidently made for his especial need.

"Please hang my posy-basket on the gas-burner in the middle of the room, where all the boys can see it. It's too pretty for one alone."

"But then you can't see it yourself, Joe, and you are fonder of such things than the rest," said Miss Hale, taking both the little basket and the hand of her pet patient, a lad of twenty, dying of rapid consumption.

"That's the reason I can spare it for a while, for I shall feel 'em in the room just the same, and they'll do the boys good. You pick out the one

you like best, for me to keep, and hang up the rest till by-and-by, please."

She gave him a sprig of mignonette, and he smiled as he took it, for it reminded him of her in her sad-coloured gown, as quiet and unobtrusive, but as grateful to the hearts of those about her, as was the fresh scent of the flower to the lonely lad who never had known womanly tenderness and care until he found them in a hospital. Joe's prediction was verified; the flowers did the boys good, for all welcomed them with approving glances, and all felt their refining influence more or less keenly, from cheery Ben, who paused to fill the cup inside with fresher water, to surly Sam, who stopped growling as his eye rested on a geranium very like the one blooming in his sweetheart's window when they parted a long year ago.

"Now, as this is to be a merry day, let us begin to enjoy it at once. Fling up the windows, Ben; and, Barney, go for breakfast while I finish washing faces and settling bed-clothes."

With which directions the little woman fell to work with such infectious energy, that in fifteen minutes thirty gentlemen with spandy clean faces and hands were partaking of refreshment with as much appetite as their various conditions would permit. Meantime the sun came up, looking

bigger, brighter, jollier than usual, as he is apt to do on Christmas days. Not a snow-flake chilled the air that blew in as blandly as if winter had relented, and wished the "boys" the compliments of the season in his mildest mood; while a festival smell pervaded the whole house, and appetizing rumours of turkey, mince-pie, and oysters for dinner circulated through the wards. When breakfast was done, the wounds dressed, directions for the day delivered, and as many of the disagreeables as possible well over, the fun began. In any other place that would have been considered a very quiet morning; but to the weary invalids prisoned in that room, it was quite a whirl of excitement. None were dangerously ill but Joe, and all were easily amused, for weakness, home-sickness, and *ennui* made every trifle a joke or an event.

In came Ben, looking like a "Jack-in-the-Green," with his load of hemlock and holly. Such of the men as could get about and had a hand to lend, lent it, and soon, under Miss Hale's direction, a green bough hung at the head of each bed, depended from the gas-burners, and nodded over the fireplace, while the finishing effect was given by a cross and crown at the top and bottom of the room. Great was the interest, many were the

mishaps, and frequent was the laughter which attended this performance; for wounded men, when convalescent, are particularly jovial. When "Daddy Mills," as one venerable volunteer was irreverently christened, expatiated learnedly upon the difference between "sprewce, hemlock, and pine," how they all listened, each thinking of some familiar wood still pleasantly haunted by boyish recollections of stolen gunnings, gum-pickings, and bird-nestings. When quiet Hayward amazed the company by coming out strong in a most unexpected direction, and telling with much effect the story of a certain "fine old gentleman" who supped on hemlock tea and died like a hero, what commendations were bestowed upon the immortal heathen in language more hearty than classical, as a twig of the historical tree was passed round like a new style of refreshment, that inquiring parties might satisfy themselves regarding the flavour of the Socratic draught. When Barney, the coloured incapable, essayed a grand ornament above the door, and, relying upon one insufficient nail, descended to survey his success with the proud exclamation, "Look at de neatness of dat job, gen'l'men,"—at which point the whole thing tumbled down about his ears,—how they all shouted but Pneumonia Ned, who,

having lost his voice, could only make ecstatic demonstrations with his legs. When Barney cast himself and his hammer despairingly upon the floor, and Miss Hale, stepping into a chair, pounded stoutly at the traitorous nail and performed some miracle with a bit of string, which made all fast, what a burst of applause arose from the beds. When gruff Dr. Bangs came in to see what all the noise was about, and the same intrepid lady not only boldly explained, but stuck a bit of holly in his button-hole, and wished him a merry Christmas with such a face full of smiles that the crabbed old doctor felt himself giving in very fast, and bolted out again, calling Christmas a humbug, and exulting over the thirty emetics he would have to prescribe on the morrow, what indignant denials followed him. And when all was done, how everybody agreed with Joe when he said, "I think we are coming Christmas in great style; things look so green and pretty, I feel as I was settin' in a bower."

Pausing to survey her work, Miss Hale saw Sam looking as black as any thundercloud. He bounced over on his bed the moment he caught her eye, but she followed him up, and gently covering the cold shoulder he evidently meant to show her, peeped over it, asking, with unabated

gentleness: "What can I do for you, Sam? I want to have all the faces in my ward bright ones to-day."

"My box ain't come; they said I should have it two, three days ago. Why don't they do it, then?" growled Ursa Major.

"It is a busy time, you know, but it will come if they promised, and patience won't delay it, I assure you."

"My patience is used up, and they are a mean set of slow-coaches. I'd get it fast enough if I wore shoulder-straps; as I don't, I'll warrant I shan't see it till the things ain't fit to eat; the news is old, and I don't care a bit about it."

"I'll see what I can do; perhaps before the hurry of dinner begins some one will have time to go for it."

"Nobody ever does have time here but folks who would give all they are worth to be stirring round. You can't get it, I know; it's my luck, so don't you worry, ma'am."

Miss Hale did not "worry," but worked, and in time a messenger was found, provided with the necessary money, pass, and directions, and despatched to hunt up the missing Christmas-box. Then she paused to see what came next, not that it was necessary to look for a task, but to decide

which, out of many, was most important to do first.

"Why, Turner, crying again so soon? What is it now? the light head or the heavy feet?"

"It's my bones, ma'am. They ache so I can't lay easy any way, and I'm so tired I just wish I could die and be out of this misery," sobbed the poor ghost of a once strong and cheery fellow, as the kind hand wiped his tears away, and gently rubbed the weary shoulders.

"Don't wish that, Turner, for the worst is over now, and all you need is to get your strength again. Make an effort to sit up a little; it is quite time you tried; a change of posture will help the ache wonderfully, and make this 'dreadful bed,' as you call it, seem very comfortable when you come back to it."

"I can't, ma'am, my legs ain't a bit of use, and I ain't strong enough even to try."

"You never will be if you don't try. Never mind the poor legs, Ben will carry you. I've got the matron's easy-chair all ready, and can make you very cosy by the fire. It's Christmas-day, you know; why not celebrate it by overcoming the despondency which retards your recovery, and prove that illness has not taken all the manhood out of you?"

"It has, though. I'll never be the man I was, and may as well lay here till spring, for I shall be no use if I do get up."

If Sam was a growler, this man was a whiner, and few hospital wards are without both. But knowing that much suffering had soured the former and pitifully weakened the latter, their nurse had patience with them, and still hoped to bring them round again. As Turner whimpered out his last dismal speech, she bethought herself of something which, in the hurry of the morning, had slipped her mind till now.

"By the way, I've got another present for you. The doctor thought I'd better not give it yet, lest it should excite you too much; but I think you need excitement to make you forget yourself, and that when you find how many blessings you have to be grateful for, you will make an effort to enjoy them."

"Blessings, ma'am? I don't see 'em."

"Don't you see one now?" and drawing a letter from her pocket, she held it before his eyes.

His listless face brightened a little as he took it, but gloomed over again as he said, fretfully:

"It's from wife, I guess. I like to get her letters, but they are always full of grievings and

groanings over me, so they don't do me much good."

"She does not grieve and groan in this one. She is too happy to do that, and so will you be when you read it."

"I don't see why—hey?—why, you don't mean——"

"Yes, I do!" cried the little woman, clapping her hands, and laughing so delightedly that the Knight of the Rueful Countenance was betrayed into a broad smile for the first time in many weeks. "Is not a splendid little daughter a present to rejoice over and be grateful for?"

"Hooray! hold on a bit—it's all right—I'll be out again in a minute."

After which remarkably spirited burst, Turner vanished under the bed-clothes, letter and all. Whether he read, laughed, or cried, in the seclusion of that cotton grotto, was unknown; but his nurse suspected that he did all three, for when he reappeared he looked as if, during that pause, he had dived into his "sea of troubles," and fished up his old self again.

"What *will* I name her," was his first remark, delivered with such vivacity that his neighbours began to think he was getting delirious again.

"What is your wife's name?" asked Miss

Hale, gladly entering into the domesticities which were producing such a salutary effect.

"Her name's Ann, but neither of us like it. I'd fixed on George, for I'd wanted my boy called after me; and now, you see, I ain't a bit prepared for this young woman."

Very proud of this young woman he seemed, nevertheless, and perfectly resigned to the loss of the expected son and heir.

"Why not call her Georgiana, then? That combines both her parents' names, and is not a bad one in itself."

"Now, that's just the brightest thing I ever heard in my life!" cried Turner, sitting bolt upright in his excitement, though half an hour before he would have considered it an utterly impossible feat. "Georgiana Butterfield Turner! It's a tip-top name, ma'am, and we can call her Georgie just the same. Ann will like that, it's so genteel. Bless 'em both! don't I wish I was at home!" and down he lay again, despairing.

"You can be before long, if you choose. Get your strength up, and off you go. Come, begin at once; drink your beef-tea, and sit up for a few minutes—just in honour of the good news, you know."

"I will, by George!—no, by Georgiana!

That's a good one, ain't it ?" and the whole ward was electrified by hearing a genuine giggle from the "Blueing-bag."

Down went the detested beef-tea, and up scrambled the determined drinker with many groans, and a curious jumble of chuckles, staggers, and fragmentary repetitions of his first, last, and only joke. But when fairly settled in the great rocking-chair, with the grey flannel gown comfortably on, and the new slippers getting their inaugural scorch, Turner forgot his bones, and swung to and fro before the fire, feeling amazingly well, and looking very like a trussed fowl being roasted in the primitive fashion. The languid importance of the man, and the irrepressible satisfaction of the parent, were both laughable and touching things to see, for the happy soul could not keep the glad tidings to himself. A hospital ward is often a small republic, beautifully governed by pity, patience, and the mutual sympathy which lessens mutual suffering. Turner was no favourite; but more than one honest fellow felt his heart warm towards him as they saw his dismal face kindle with fatherly pride, and heard the querulous quaver of his voice soften with fatherly affection, as he said, "My little Georgie, sir."

"He'll do now, ma'am; this has given him

the lift he needed, and in a week or two he'll be off our hands."

Big Ben made the remark with a beaming countenance, and Big Ben deserves a word of praise, because he never said one for himself. An ex-patient, promoted to an attendant's place, which he filled so well that he was regarded as a model for all the rest to copy. Patient, strong, and tender, he seemed to combine many of the best traits of both man and woman; for he appeared to know by instinct where the soft spot was to be found in every heart, and how best to help sick body or sad soul. No one would have guessed this to have seen him lounging in the hall during one of the short rests he allowed himself. A brawny, six-foot fellow, in red shirt, blue trousers tucked into his boots, an old cap, visor always up, and under it a roughly-bearded, coarsely-featured face, whose prevailing expression was one of great gravity and kindliness, though a humorous twinkle of the eye at times betrayed the man, whose droll sayings often set the boys in a roar. "A good-natured, clumsy body" would have been the verdict passed upon him by a casual observer; but watch him in his ward, and see how great a wrong that hasty judgment would have done him.

Unlike his predecessor, who helped himself generously when the meals came up, and carelessly served out rations for the rest, leaving even the most helpless to bungle for themselves or wait till he was done, shut himself into his pantry, and there—to borrow a hospital phrase—gormed, Ben often left nothing for himself, or took cheerfully such cold bits as remained when all the rest were served; so patiently feeding the weak, being hands and feet to the maimed, and a pleasant provider for all, that, as one of the boys said—"It gives a relish to the vittles to have Ben fetch 'em." If one were restless, Ben carried him in his strong arms; if one were undergoing the sharp torture of the surgeon's knife, Ben held him with a touch as firm as kind; if one were homesick, Ben wrote letters for him with great hearty blots and dashes under all the affectionate or important words. More than one poor fellow read his fate in Ben's pitiful eyes, and breathed his last breath away on Ben's broad breast—always a quiet pillow till its work was done, then it would heave with genuine grief, as his big hand softly closed the tired eyes, and made another comrade ready for the last review. The war shows us many Bens—for the same power of human pity which makes women brave also makes men tender; and each is the

womanlier, the manlier, for these revelations of unsuspected strength and sympathies.

At twelve o'clock, dinner was the prevailing idea in ward No. 3, and when the door opened every man sniffed, for savoury odours broke loose from the kitchens and went roaming about the house. Now this Christmas dinner had been much talked of; for certain charitable and patriotic persons had endeavoured to provide every hospital in Washington with materials for this time-hõnoured feast. Some mistake in the list sent to head-quarters, some unpardonable neglect of orders, or some premeditated robbery, caused the long-expected dinner in the —— Hospital to prove a dead failure; but to which of these causes it was attributable was never known, for the deepest mystery enveloped that sad transaction. The full weight of the dire disappointment was mercifully lightened by premonitions of the impending blow. Barney was often missing; for the attendants were to dine *en masse* after the patients were done, therefore a speedy banquet for the latter parties was ardently desired, and he probably devoted his energies to goading on the cooks. From time to time he appeared in the doorway, flushed and breathless, made some thrilling announcement, and vanished, leaving ever-increasing

appetite, impatience and expectation, behind him.

Dinner was to be served at one; at half-past twelve Barney exclaimed, "Dere ain't no vegetables but squash and pitaters." A universal groan arose; and several indignant parties on a short allowance of meat consigned the defaulting cook to a warmer climate than the tropical one he was then enjoying. At twenty minutes to one, Barney increased the excitement by whispering ominously, "I say, de puddins isn't plummy ones."

"Fling a piller at him and shut the door, Ben," roared one irascible being, while several others *not* fond of puddings received the fact with equanimity. At a quarter to one Barney piled up the agony by adding the bitter information, "Dere isn't but two turkeys for dis ward, and dey's little fellers."

Anxiety instantly appeared in every countenance, and intricate calculations were made as to how far the two fowls would go when divided among thirty men; also friendly warnings were administered to several of the feebler gentlemen not to indulge too freely, if at all, for fear of relapses. Once more did the bird of evil omen return, for at ten minutes to one Barney croaked

through the key-hole, "Only jes half ob de pies has come, gen'l'men." That capped the climax, for the masculine palate has a predilection for pastry, and mince-pie was the sheet anchor to which all had clung when other hopes went down. Even Ben looked dismayed; not that he expected anything but the perfume and pickings for his share, but he had set his heart on having the dinner an honour to the institution and a memorable feast for the men, so far away from home, and all that usually makes the day a festival among the poorest. He looked pathetically grave as Turner began to fret, Sam began to swear under his breath, Hayward to sigh, Joe to wish it was all over, and the rest began to vent their emotions with a freedom which was anything but inspiring. At that moment Miss Hale came in with a great basket of apples and oranges in one hand, and several convivial-looking bottles in the other.

"Here is our dessert, boys! A kind friend remembered us, and we will drink her health in her own currant wine."

A feeble smile circulated round the room, and in some sanguine bosoms hope revived again. Ben briskly emptied the basket, while Miss Hale whispered to Joe:

"I know you would be glad to get away from

the confusion of this next hour, to enjoy a breath of fresh air, and dine quietly with Mrs. Burton round the corner, wouldn't you?"

"Oh, ma'am, so much! the noise, the smells, the fret and flurry, make me sick just to think of! But how can I go? that dreadful ambulance 'most killed me last time, and I'm weaker now."

"My dear boy, I have no thought of trying that again till our ambulances are made fit for the use of weak and wounded men. Mrs. Burton's carriage is at the door, with her motherly self inside, and all you have got to do is to let me bundle you up, and Ben carry you out."

With a long sigh of relief Joe submitted to both these processes, and when his nurse watched his happy face as the carriage slowly rolled away, she felt well repaid for the little sacrifice of rest and pleasure so quietly made; for Mrs. Burton came to carry her, not Joe, away.

"Now, Ben, help me to make this unfortunate dinner go off as well as we can," she whispered. "On many accounts it is a mercy that the men are spared the temptations of a more generous meal; pray don't tell them so, but make the best of it, as you know very well how to do."

"I'll try my best, Miss Hale, but I'm no less disappointed, for some of 'em, being no better

than children, have been living on the thoughts of it for a week, and it comes hard to give it up."

If Ben had been an old-time patriarch, and the thirty boys his sons, he could not have spoken with a more paternal regret, or gone to work with a better will. Putting several small tables together in the middle of the room, he left Miss Hale to make a judicious display of plates, knives and forks, while he departed for the banquet. Presently he returned, bearing the youthful turkeys and the vegetables in his tray, followed by Barney, looking unutterable things at a plum-pudding baked in a milk-pan, and six very small pies. Miss Hale played a lively tattoo as the procession approached, and, when the viands were arranged, with the red and yellow fruit prettily heaped up in the middle, it really did look like a dinner.

"Here's richness! here's the delicacies of the season and the comforts of life!" said Ben, falling back to survey the table with as much apparent satisfaction as if it had been a lord mayor's feast.

"Come, hurry up, and give us our dinner, what there is of it!" grumbled Sam.

"Boys," continued Ben, beginning to cut up the turkeys, "these noble birds have been sacri-

ficed for the defenders of their country; they will go as far as ever they can, and, when they can't go any farther, we shall endeavour to supply their deficiencies with soup or ham, oysters having given out unexpectedly. Put it to vote: both have been provided on this joyful occasion, and a word will fetch either."

"Ham! ham!" resounded from all sides. Soup was an every-day affair, and therefore repudiated with scorn; but ham, being a rarity, was accepted as a proper reward of merit and a tacit acknowledgment of their wrongs.

The "noble birds" did go as far as possible, and were handsomely assisted by their fellow martyr. The pudding was not as plummy as could have been desired, but a slight exertion of fancy made the crusty nobs do duty for raisins. The pies were small, yet a laugh added flavour to the mouthful apiece, for, when Miss Hale asked Ben to cut them up, that individual regarded her with an inquiring aspect as he said, in his drollest tone:

"I wouldn't wish to appear stupid, ma'am, but, when you mention 'pies,' I presume you allude to these trifles. 'Tarts,' or 'patties,' would meet my views better, in speaking of the third course of this lavish dinner. As such I will do

my duty by 'em, hoping that the appetites is to match."

Carefully dividing the six pies into twenty-nine diminutive wedges, he placed each in the middle of a large clean plate, and handed them about with the gravity of an undertaker. Dinner had restored good humour to many; this hit at the pies put the finishing touch to it, and from that moment an atmosphere of jollity prevailed. Healths were drunk in currant wine, apples and oranges flew about as an impromptu game of ball was got up, Miss Hale sang a Christmas carol, and Ben gambolled like a sportive giant as he cleared away. Pausing in one of his prances to and fro, he beckoned the nurse out, and, when she followed, handed her a plate heaped up with good things from a better table than she ever sat at now.

"From the matron, ma'am. Come right in here and eat it while it's hot; they are most through in the dining-room, and you'll get nothing half so nice," said Ben, leading the way into his pantry and pointing to a sunny window-seat.

"Are you sure she meant it for me, and not for yourself, Ben?"

"Of course she did! Why, what should I do with it, when I've just been feastin' sumptuous in this very room?"

"I don't exactly see what you have been feasting on," said Miss Hale, glancing round the tidy pantry as she sat down.

"Havin' eat up the food and washed up the dishes, it naturally follows that you don't see, ma'am. But if I go off in a fit by-and-by you'll know what it's owin' to," answered Ben, vainly endeavouring to look like a man suffering from repletion.

"Such kind fibs are not set down against one, Ben, so I will eat your dinner, for if I don't I know you will throw it out of the window to prove that you can't eat it."

"Thankee, ma'am, I'm afraid I should; for, at the rate he's going on, Barney wouldn't be equal to it," said Ben, looking very much relieved, as he polished his last pewter fork and hung his towels up to dry.

A pretty general siesta followed the excitement of dinner, but by three o'clock the public mind was ready for amusement, and the arrival of Sam's box provided it. He was asleep when it was brought in and quietly deposited at his bed's foot, ready to surprise him on awaking. The advent of a box was a great event, for the fortunate receiver seldom failed to "stand treat," and next best to getting things from one's own home was the getting them

from some other boy's home. This was an unusually large box, and all felt impatient to have it opened, though Sam's exceeding crustiness prevented the indulgence of great expectations. Presently he roused, and the first thing his eye fell upon was the box, with his own name sprawling over it in big black letters. As if it were merely the continuance of his dream, he stared stupidly at it for a moment, then rubbed his eyes and sat up, exclaiming:

"Hullo! that's mine."

"Ah! who said it wouldn't come? who hadn't the faith of a grasshopper? and who don't half deserve it for being a Barker by nater as by name?" cried Ben, emphasizing each question with a bang on the box, as he waited, hammer in hand, for the arrival of the ward-master, whose duty it was to oversee the opening of such matters, lest contraband articles should do mischief to the owner or his neighbours.

"Ain't it a jolly big one? Knock it open, and don't wait for anybody or anything," cried Sam, tumbling off his bed and beating impatiently on the lid with his one hand.

In came the ward-master, off came the cover, and out came a motley collection of apples, socks, dough-nuts, paper, pickles, photographs, pocket-

handkerchiefs, gingerbread, letters, jelly, newspapers, tobacco, and cologne.

"All right; glad it's come; don't kill yourself," said the ward-master, as he took a hasty survey and walked off again.

Drawing the box nearer the bed, Ben delicately followed, and Sam was left to brood over his treasures in peace.

At first all the others, following Ben's example, made elaborate pretences of going to sleep, being absorbed in books, or utterly uninterested in the outer world. But very soon curiosity got the better of politeness, and one by one they all turned round and stared. They might have done so from the first, for Sam was perfectly unconscious of everything but his own affairs, and, having read the letters, looked at the pictures, unfolded the bundles, turned everything inside out and upside down, tasted all the eatables, and made a spectacle of himself with jelly, he paused to get his breath and find his way out of the confusion he had created. Presently he called out:

"Miss Hale, will you come and right up my things for me?" adding, as her woman's hands began to bring matters straight, "I don't know what to do with 'em all, for some won't keep

long, and it will take pretty steady eating to get through 'em in time, supposin' appetite holds out."

"How do the others manage with their things?"

"You know they give 'em away; but I'll be hanged if I do, for they are always callin' names and pokin' fun at me. Guess they won't get anything out of me now."

The old morose look came back as he spoke, for it had disappeared while reading the home letters, touching the home gifts. Still busily folding and arranging, Miss Hale asked:

"You know the story of the Three Cakes. Which are you going to be—Harry, Peter, or Billy?"

Sam began to laugh at this sudden application of the nursery legend; and, seeing her advantage, Miss Hale pursued it:

"We all know how much you have suffered, and all respect you for the courage with which you have borne your long confinement and your loss; but don't you think you have given the boys some cause for making fun of you, as you say? You used to be a favourite, and can be again, if you will only put off these crusty ways, which will grow upon you faster than you think. Better

lose both arms than cheerfulness and self-control, Sam."

Pausing to see how her little lecture was received, she saw that Sam's better self was waking up, and added yet another word, hoping to help a mental ailment as she had done so many physical ones. Looking up at him with her kind eyes, she said, in a lowered voice:

"This day, on which the most perfect life began, is a good day for all of us to set about making ourselves readier to follow that divine example. Troubles are helpers if we take them kindly, and the bitterest may sweeten us for all our lives. Believe and try this, Sam, and when you go away from us, let those who love you find that two battles have been fought, two victories won."

Sam made no answer, but sat thoughtfully picking at the half-eaten cookey in his hand. Presently he stole a glance about the room, and, as if all helps were waiting for him, his eye met Joe's. From his solitary corner by the fire and the bed he would seldom leave again until he went into his grave, the boy smiled back at him so heartily, so happily, that something gushed warm across Sam's heart as he looked down upon the faces of mother, sister, sweetheart scattered round

him, and remembered how poor his comrade was in all such tender ties, and yet how rich in that beautiful content, which, "having nothing, yet hath all." The man had no words in which to express this feeling, but it came to him and did him good, as he proved in his own way. "Miss Hale," he said, a little awkwardly, "I wish you'd pick out what you think each would like, and give 'em to the boys."

He got a smile in answer that drove him to his cookey as a refuge, for his lips would tremble, and he felt half proud, half ashamed, to have earned such bright approval.

"Let Ben help you; he knows better than I. But you must give them all yourself, it will so surprise and please the boys; and then to-morrow we will write a capital letter home, telling what a jubilee we made over their fine box."

At this proposal Sam half repented; but as Ben came lumbering up at Miss Hale's summons, he laid hold of his new resolution as if it was a sort of shower-bath and he held the string, one pull of which would finish the baptism. Dividing his most cherished possession, which (alas for romance!) was the tobacco, he bundled the larger half into a paper, whispering to Miss Hale:

"Ben ain't exactly what you'd call a minis-

terin' angel to look at, but he is amazin' near one in his ways, so I'm goin' to begin with him."

Up came the "ministering angel" in red flannel and cowhide boots; and Sam tucked the little parcel into his pocket, saying, as he began to rummage violently in the box:

"Now jest hold your tongue, and lend a hand here about these things."

Ben was so taken aback by this proceeding that he stared blankly, till a look from Miss Hale enlightened him; and, taking his cue, he played his part as well as could be expected on so short a notice. Clapping Sam on the shoulder—not the bad one; Ben was always thoughtful of those things—he exclaimed heartily:

"I always said you'd come round when this poor arm of yours got a good start, and here you are jollier'n ever. Lend a hand! so I will, a pair of 'em. What's to do? Pack these traps up again?"

"No; I want you to tell what *you'd* do with 'em if they were yours. Free, you know—as free you know as if they really was."

Ben held on to the box a minute as if this second surprise rather took him off his legs; but another look from the prime mover in this resolu-

tion steadied him, and he fell to work as if Sam had been in the habit of being "free."

"Well, let's see. I think I'd put the clothes and sich into this smaller box that the bottles come in, 'an stan' it under the table, handy. Here's newspapers—pictures in 'em, too! I should make a circulatin' lib'ry of them; they'll be a real treat. Pickles—well, I guess I should keep them on the winder here as a kind of a relish dinner-times, or to pass along to them as longs for 'em. Cologne—that's a dreadful handsome bottle, ain't it? That now, would be fust-rate to give away to somebody as was very fond of it—a kind of delicate attention, you know—if you happen to meet such a person anywheres."

Ben nodded towards Miss Hale, who was absorbed in folding pocket handkerchiefs. Sam winked expressively, and patted the bottle as if congratulating himself that it *was* handsome, and that he *did* know what to do with it. The pantomime was not elegant, but as much real affection and respect went into it as if he had made a set speech, and presented the gift upon his knees.

"The letters and photographs I should probably keep under my piller for a spell; the jelly I'd give to Miss Hale, to use for the sick ones; the cake

stuff and that pot of jam, that's gettin' ready to work, I'd stand treat with for tea, as dinner wasn't all we could have wished. The apples I'd keep to eat, and fling at Joe when he was too bashful to ask for one, and the *tobacco* I would *not* go lavishin' on folks that have no business to be enjoyin' luxuries when many a poor feller is dyin' of want down to Charlestown. There, sir, that's what *I'd* do if any one was so clever as to send me a jolly box like this."

Sam was enjoying the full glow of his shower-bath by this time. As Ben designated the various articles, he set them apart; and when the inventory ended, he marched away with the first instalment: two of the biggest, rosiest apples for Joe, and all the pictorial papers. Pickles are not usually regarded as tokens of regard, but as Sam dealt them out one at a time—for he would let nobody help him, and his single hand being the left, was as awkward as it was willing—the boys' faces brightened; for a friendly word accompanied each, which made the sour gherkins as welcome as sweetmeats. With every trip the donor's spirits rose; for Ben circulated freely between whiles, and, thanks to him, not an allusion to the past marred the satisfaction of the present. Jam, soda-biscuits, and cake, were such welcome additions to

the usual bill of fare, that when supper was over a vote of thanks was passed, and speeches were made; for, being true Americans, the ruling passion found vent in the usual "Fellow-citizens!" and allusions to the "Star-spangled Banner." After which Sam subsided, feeling himself a public benefactor, and a man of mark.

A perfectly easy, pleasant day throughout would be almost an impossibility in any hospital, and this one was no exception to the general rule; for, at the usual time, Dr. Bangs went his rounds, leaving the customary amount of discomfort, discontent, and dismay behind him. A skilful surgeon and an excellent man was Dr. Bangs, but not a sanguine or conciliatory individual; many cares and crosses caused him to regard the world as one large hospital, and his fellow-beings all more or less dangerously wounded patients in it. He saw life through the bluest of blue spectacles, and seemed to think that the sooner people quitted it the happier for them. He did his duty by the men, but if they recovered he looked half disappointed, and congratulated them with cheerful prophecies that there would come a time when they would wish they hadn't. If one died he seemed relieved, and surveyed him with pensive satisfaction, saying heartily:

"He's comfortable, now, poor soul, and well out of this miserable world, thank God!"

But for Ben the sanitary influences of the doctor's ward would have been small, and Dante's doleful line might have been written on the threshold of the door—

"Who enters here leaves hope behind."

Ben and the doctor perfectly understood and liked each other, but never agreed, and always skirmished over the boys as if manful cheerfulness and medical despair were fighting for the soul and body of each one.

"Well," began the doctor, looking at Sam's arm, or, rather, all that was left of that member after two amputations, "we shall be ready for another turn at this in a day or two if it don't mend faster. Tetanus sometimes follows such cases, but that is soon over, and I should not object to a case of it, by way of variety." Sam's hopeful face fell, and he set his teeth as if the fatal symptoms were already felt.

"If one kind of lockjaw was more prevailing than 'tis, it wouldn't be a bad thing for some folks I could mention," observed Ben, covering the well-healed stump as carefully as if it were a sleeping

baby; adding, as the doctor walked away, "There's a sanguinary old sawbones for you! Why, bless your buttons, Sam, you are doing splendid, and he goes on that way because there's no chance of his having another cut at you! Now's he's squenchin' Turner, jest as we've blowed a spark of spirit into him. If ever there was a born extinguisher it's Bangs!"

Ben rushed to the rescue, and not a minute too soon; for Turner, who now laboured under the delusion that his recovery depended upon his getting out of bed every fifteen minutes, was sitting by the fire, looking up at the doctor, who pleasantly observed, while feeling his pulse:

"So you are getting ready for another fever, are you? Well, we've grown rather fond of you, and will keep you six weeks longer if you have set your heart on it."

Turner looked nervous, for the doctor's jokes were always grim ones; but Ben took the other hand in his, and gently rocked the chair as he replied, with great politeness:

"This robust convalescent of ourn would be happy to oblige you, sir, but he has a pressin' engagement up to Jersey for next week, and couldn't stop on no account. You see, Mrs.

Turner wants a careful nuss for little Georgie, and he's a-goin' to take the place."

Feeling himself on the brink of a laugh as Turner simpered, with a ludicrous mixture of pride in his baby and fear for himself, Dr. Bangs said, with unusual sternness and a glance at Ben:

"You take the responsibility of this step upon yourself, do you? Very well; then I wash my hands of Turner; only, if that bed is empty in a week, don't lay the blame of it at my door."

"Nothing shall induce me to do it, sir," briskly responded Ben. "Now, then, turn in, my boy, and sleep your prettiest, for I wouldn't but disappoint that cheerfullest of men for a month's wages; and that's liberal, as I ain't likely to get it."

"How is this young man after the rash dissipations of the day?" asked the doctor, pausing at the bed in the corner, after he had made a lively progress down the room, hotly followed by Ben.

"I'm first-rate, sir," panted Joe, who always said so, though each day found him feebler than the last.

Every one was kind to Joe, even the gruff

doctor, whose manner softened, and who was forced to frown heavily to hide the pity in his eyes.

"How's the cough?"

"Better, sir; being weaker, I can't fight against it as I used to do, so it comes rather easier."

"Sleep any last night?"

"Not much; but it's very pleasant laying here when the room is still, and no light but the fire. Ben keeps it bright; and, when I fret, he talks to me, and makes the time go telling stories till he gets so sleepy he can hardly speak. Dear old Ben! I hope he'll have some one as kind to him, when he needs it, as I do now."

"He will get what he deserves by-and-by, you may be sure of that," said the doctor, as severely as if Ben had merited eternal condemnation.

A great drop splashed down upon the hearth as Joe spoke; but Ben put his foot on it, and turned about as if defying any one to say he shed it.

"Of all the perverse and reckless women whom I have known in the course of a forty years' practice, this one is the most perverse and reckless,"

said the doctor, abruptly addressing Miss Hale, who just then appeared, bringing Joe's "posy-basket" back. "You will oblige me, ma'am, by sitting in this chair with your hands folded for twenty minutes; the clock will then strike nine, and you will go straight up to your bed."

Miss Hale demurely sat down, and the doctor ponderously departed, sighing regretfully as he went through the room, as if disappointed that the whole thirty were not lying at death's door; but on the threshold he turned about, exclaimed, "Good-night, boys! God bless you!" and vanished as precipitately as if a trap-door had swallowed him up.

Miss Hale was a perverse woman in some things; for, instead of folding her tired hands, she took a rusty-covered volume from the mantle-piece, and, sitting by Joe's bed, began to read aloud. One by one all other sounds grew still; one by one the men composed themselves to listen; and one by one the words of the sweet old Christmas story came to them, as the woman's quiet voice went reading on. If any wounded spirit needed balm, if any hungry heart asked food, if any upright purpose, new-born aspiration, or sincere repentance wavered for want of human strength, all found help, hope, and consolation in

the beautiful and blessed influences of the book, the reader, and the hour.

The bells rung nine, the lights grew dim, the day's work was done; but Miss Hale lingered beside Joe's bed, for his face wore a wistful look, and he seemed loath to have her go.

"What is it, dear?" she said. "What can I do for you before I leave you to Ben's care?"

He drew her nearer, and whispered earnestly:

"It's something that I know you'll do for me, because I can't do it for myself, not as I want it done, and you can. I'm going pretty fast now, ma'am; and when some one else is laying here, I want you to tell the boys—every one, from Ben to Barney—how much I thanked 'em, how much I loved 'em, and how glad I was that I had known 'em, even for such a little while."

"Yes, Joe, I'll tell them all. What else can I do, my boy?"

"Only let me say to you what no one else must say for me, that all I want to live for is to try and do something in my poor way to show you how I thank you, ma'am. It isn't what you've said to me, it isn't what you've done for me alone, that makes me grateful; it's because

you've learned me many things without knowing it, showed me what I ought to have been before, if I'd had any one to tell me how, and made this such a happy, homelike place, I shall be sorry when I have to go."

Poor Joe! it must have fared hardly with him all these twenty years, if a hospital seemed homelike, and a little sympathy, a little care, could fill him with such earnest gratitude. He stopped a moment to lay his cheek upon the hand he held in both of his, then hurried on as if he felt his breath beginning to give out:

"I dare say many boys have said this to you, ma'am, better than I can, for I don't say half I feel; but I know that none of 'em ever thanked you as I thank you in my heart, or ever loved you as I'll love you all my life. To-day I hadn't anything to give you, I'm so poor; but I wanted to tell you this, on the last Christmas I shall ever see."

It was a very humble kiss he gave that hand; but the fervour of a first love warmed it, and the sincerity of a great gratitude made it both a precious and pathetic gift to one who, half unconsciously, had made this brief and barren life so rich and happy at its close.

Always womanly and tender, Miss Hale's

face was doubly so as she leaned over him, whispering:

"I have had my present now. Good-night, Joe."

4 times, 1895

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